

THE GREAT MOMENT

• ELINOR GLYN •

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# MAN AND MAID

By ELINOR GLYN

"It is a dashinglly written tale along unexpected lines."—*Times Star, Cincinnati.*

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# THE GREAT MOMENT

BY

Mrs. ELINOR GLYN

AUTHOR OF "MAN AND MAID," "THREE WEEKS," ETC.



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON  
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## FOREWORD

THE GREAT MOMENT is a story dealing with the study of conflicting instincts in a girl, inherited from a highly civilized aristocratic English father and a wild Russian Gypsy mother. Nadine is anything but a heroine! She is indeed a primitive creature in many respects, and so, in these tired sophisticated days, may be interesting on that account. The hero, Bayard Delaval, represents splendid American manhood. The public will have to say whether they think I have portrayed him well! At all events, he is an attractive character, and many girls would like to meet him! Every scene in the book is drawn from life, and from intimate knowledge of such persons and such places. To me it would seem presumption ever to write of what I do not personally know. I wanted to make an American hero, because I have a deep respect for the young American spirit, which is not well enough known in Europe. So this is my little contribution to better acquaintance, and as such I leave it in the hands of my kind readers.

NEW YORK, June, 1923

ELINOR GLYN

face of the Madonna in the ikon gently smiled, as in pity at human failings.

But now the chief of the troop called a halt, and the obedient girls drew back into line. Only Nada, the lovely, wicked, unbiddable Nada, was determined to go on, and when the chief seized her roughly to pull her back, she turned upon him and bit his arm! With a cry of rage the man wiped the blood with his sleeve, and would have beaten her; but the Englishman rushed forward and took her from him, and then with the spring of a panther she was on the table, and sweeping the glasses and dishes aside with her red booted feet, she began the maddest dance. The musicians, exalted to frenzy, never had played so well, and amidst a scene of indescribable excitement and intoxication, at last, exhausted, the beautiful wild thing fell back into Sir Edward's arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

And the memory of her kisses stays with him still.

\* \* \* \* \*

Out there in the chill November sunlight he could see his daughter, Nadine. How like she was growing to Nada—what was to be done?

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Blenkinsop walked on a little ahead. Nadine was in one of her impossible moods, and it was best to leave the child to herself. She had stopped for a moment to speak to one of the gardeners, old Prodgers, who was sweeping the dead leaves from the lawn.

Hester Blenkinsop's life at Pelham Court could not be considered as a bed of roses, in spite of the liberal

salary she received, and the complete authority she exercised. The truth was that her charge, Nadine Pelham, had a temperament ill suited to the conventional standards of this admirable governess!

Miss Blenkinsop could never be quite certain what she meant to do next, or how any fresh aspect of even the most ordinary branch of knowledge she was trying to drum into her head, was going to affect her! But Sir Edward trusted her completely, and she was not a woman to betray a trust.

So she stayed on year after year—buried away there down in the country, miles from anywhere, in a secluded corner of Somerset, far from the world. That everything was conducted with a bygone state helped a little. Hester Blenkinsop liked state and regularity, but she could have wished that Sir Edward came to his home oftener—the responsibility of Nadine's education and training in suitable ideas of correct behaviour was no light burden, and seldom touching the outside world made her fear that rust might accumulate. For she liked to feel that she was well up in modern scientific ideas, and she read anything that she could get hold of—so long as it had nothing to do with sex. Sex was nasty, and should be ignored, if it could not be altogether stamped out. No true lady should admit that there was such a thing! and Miss Blenkinsop meant to take good care that Nadine Pelham never heard the word mentioned even. Sex, indeed! Stuff and nonsense, modern nervy rubbish!

Miss Blenkinsop's face was as hard as nails; she was thinking that it was a great pity that the natures of parents should have to come out again in their



children, instead of there having been some sensible plan evolved where they could all be made to suitable patterns. And why should the worse parent invariably seem to leave the indelible mark?

Here was Sir Edward Pelham—everything that an English gentleman should be—dignified, reserved, given to no excesses, and to think that he should have married a Russian gipsy, a wild creature who could neither read nor write! And who, in her short two years, of life at Pelham Court, had scandalized the whole neighbourhood. The parson's wife, Mrs. Gleeson, had whispered *terrible* things into Miss Blenkinsop's virgin ears, when she first came to Pelham, about the dead Nada!

So what could one expect from Nada's daughter?

"Blenkie! Blenkie! Adolphus and Jacob have six lovely little fluffy babies, Prodgers tells me! I did not know boys could have children!" and Nadine came up at a run. "Do hurry, and I'll take you to see them."

Miss Blenkinsop flushed painfully; she had never wanted her charge to have those guinea-pigs. One could not be quite sure how any animal would turn out, even if it was called Adolphus or Jacob! But Nadine rushed her along until she came to the hutch beyond the potting-sheds, next to the stable-yard.

The child was wild with delight. Her black curly hair flying in the November wind, and her eyes—"blue as the fairy flax"—brilliant with excitement. Some young things—all her own—whom she could play with presently! Where on earth could they have come from in the night? But there was no use in asking Blenkie anything!

"Aren't they *heavenly!*" Her voice was awed, as

with reverential care she pushed Adolphus to one side, and displayed Jacob endeavoring to hide a numerous progeny.

“I am told guinea-pigs eat their young if you look at them, Nadine,” Miss Blenkinsop remarked severely. “Come away, dear, and leave them alone for the present.”

Nadine’s blue eyes filled with angry tears. “Jacob and Adolphus could never be cannibals, Miss Blenkinsop,” she said indignantly.

But old Prodgers had arrived on the scene by now: “It would be wiser, Miss, to leave them for a day or two,” he said. So, reluctantly, Nadine allowed herself to be taken away.

They were going into the chapel across the lawn to put the wreath on Nada’s tomb, a duty performed every Saturday, summer and winter. But to-day the wreath was a particularly nice one, for to-morrow would be the tenth anniversary of the death of the beautiful gipsy. Nadine knew every bit of the carving upon the tomb—fine marble in excellent taste—and she had wondered ever since she could think what the mother was like who slept inside it? It seemed very confusing to her that they had to put flowers on a bit of stone, if the person beneath it could not feel or see anything, and was in reality up in the sky somewhere, singing with angels! She had argued with Blenkie about it often, but could get no satisfactory answer.

“The spirit of your mother is in heaven, my dear,” Miss Blenkinsop always replied, feeling herself uncomfortable at having to assert a fib: for of course such a

person as Nada would not be up there, but down in a region unmentioned in polite society!

“Then, if mamma is in heaven, why must we put flowers on the tomb, Blenkie?”

“To her memory, dear.”

“But no one wants to remember mamma. Papa won't talk of her, ever—you won't tell me anything about her—Nanna never spoke of her—Augustine never saw her, of course. Mrs. Acton speaks of something else whenever I have asked her about mamma, because she must have known her, since she's been the housekeeper since Adam!—and you won't let me talk to the housemaids, even old Mary, who was here when I was born. Why must I put flowers to mamma's memory?”

And, driven into a corner, Miss Blenkinsop replied: “Because your father wishes it.”

When she quoted Sir Edward, Nadine knew that this was final, and with a rebellious sigh, she usually abandoned the conversation. To-day she was worked up, the advent of the guinea-pigs' family had excited her. Her father's unexpected return last night had disturbed her. Life seemed a complicated affair, full of inhibitions. If Nadine could have worded the concentrated essence of her soul thoughts, as she knelt by her mother's tomb that November day of 1913 when she was nearly eleven years old, they would have expressed themselves in the cry of Sterne's starling: “I can't get out—I can't get out—”

Meanwhile, in the library, Sir Edward was musing. He owed an obvious duty to the child. He must do everything he possibly could to crush out that unfortu-



nate wildness in her which Blenkinsop's report showed every time he returned home. To surround her with the quietest influences, to keep her away from the world, no one could be better than Blenkinsop, and the French maid, Augustine, had the highest references; but with the instincts she would be bound to inherit, as well as the beauty, of her mother, the most careful training would be necessary to eliminate the Russian gipsy instincts, and shape her into the Pelham mould.

Sir Edward looked up to the portrait above the mantelpiece of an ancestor of his of Elizabeth's time. They had come down in unbroken line—always respected—always admirable members of their rank and name. And now an accident had robbed him of his dead brother's son, a promising boy—and the whole thing would go to a distant cousin, Eustace by name—one whom he had never seen. Oh! what a tragedy that he himself had no son. And yet—and yet—nothing bad was known of Eustace, a worthy youth just entering the diplomatic service, and if Nadine had been a boy? Who knows?—and here Sir Edward sighed again; and, rising, rang the bell.

“Tell Miss Blenkinsop to come to me,” he said to the footman who answered it, “as soon as she comes in.”

And presently the door opened and the governess entered, a little breathlessly.

“What have you to report about my daughter, may I ask, this time?”

Sir Edward was always sententious, and if he mixed in the world in London and Paris in an up-to-

date way, none but the ceremonious manners of a bygone time were seen in his home.

Miss Blenkinsop had nothing special to complain of—only Nadine's irrepressible personality—unaccountable fits of depression, and equally unaccountable bursts of gaiety. Her worst action in the last fortnight had been to pour her bedroom jug of water down upon the Reverend Mr. Gleeson, who had come up with some papers about the village concert, and was in conversation with herself, just under Nadine's window!

"I hate Mr. Gleeson," was all Nadine would say when reproached and scolded about it, and nothing would make her apologize! "'I shan't say I am sorry' is what she said, Sir Edward. 'He has no business to have such a red nose!'"

For a moment the flicker of a smile came into Nadine's parent's eyes. It was certainly true Mr. Gleeson was no beauty, and his nose was a beacon well known all over the parish, but this was not sufficient reason for him to have had a bedroom jug of cold water poured over him on a chilly November day!

"I smoothed the matter over as best I could at the rectory, Sir Edward. I am afraid I was obliged to tell an untruth, and say it was an accident, but I could not take Nadine to church on the Sunday after, for she went into fits of laughter whenever Mr. Gleeson was mentioned, and put out her tongue in a most unseemly way, and I really feared it might happen in the sacred edifice; but some guinea-pigs that she was given by Johnny Parker, the new head keeper's son, took her attention off the matter, and now she has forgotten about it"; then Miss Blenkinsop blushed

uneasily. "I had hoped the animals were males, Sir Edward, and Nadine had christened them 'Adolphus' and 'Jacob,' but unfortunately Jacob has had a large family, and Prodgers gave me to understand that these unpleasant incidents occur very frequently among these species of the animal world."

"You had better dispose of them quietly, Miss Blenkinsop," and Sir Edward turned to the window, where beyond Nadine could now be seen taking jumps backwards and forwards over the big broom made of twigs with which old Prodgers had been sweeping the lawn. Its end was propped on to a garden bench, and the old man himself balanced the handle to make a hurdle—raising it higher and higher each time. Then when she had had enough of this, with a wild whoop she kicked the broom into the air, and was off racing round and round the beautiful velvety lawn, which stretched away down to the Italian garden, calling to the two new sheep-dogs with shrill shouts of joy.

"So full of life!" her father said with unconscious admiration. And then he sighed.



## CHAPTER II

MUSIC had a powerful effect upon Nadine, especially certain kinds. Sir Edward had a party to shoot his large coverts early in the December of 1913, and among them an attaché from the Russian Embassy, Prince Kurousov—a rather decadent wit, with a pretty talent for the violin. Nadine, who came down in the afternoon for tea with Blenkie, took a violent fancy to him; she sat as close to him as she could, and gazed up into his face, and when he began playing Russian music in the crimson drawing-room after tea, it seemed to Sir Edward that the spirit of Nada lived again in their child.

Prince Kurousov played something with the “Red Sarafane” wailing through it, and he remembered that this was the very air which the gipsies had woven into their music to please the Grand Duke, and which Nada had danced to, on that unforgettable night when she first melted into his arms. Nadine jumped up from her seat beside Miss Blenkinsop, and, picking up her little skirts, began to pirouette about the room, all sense of shyness or decorum quite forgotten in her pleasure. The guests were delighted, and full of admiration. Only Lord Crombie looked on with a glass fixed in his knowing old eye, and Sir Edward winced with the pain of his memories.

“You’ll probably have to be careful with that child, Ned,” Lord Crombie said—they were companions in the diplomatic service, and very old friends. “Watch

her movements, she has not learned these from her dancing mistress!"

Nadine's little shoulders were fluttering in a rhythmic fashion, and there was a good deal more stamp than tiptoeing in her gyrations. A wild delight came over Prince Kurousov.

"Beautiful little Russian gipsy!" he said, throwing down his violin and picking her up in his arms. But Nadine turned upon him with a fierce gesture, and showed all her strong white teeth. If he had not let her go that instant she would have bitten his arm.

A great anger came over Sir Edward—anger and fear—and he advanced towards the child with a look in his grey eyes which seemed to freeze the blood in her veins.

Before he could speak to her, Lord Crombie linked his arm in his, and drew him towards the group of men by the fireplace—while Lady Crombie stretched out her hands to the little frightened creature, and drew her to her side, telling her lightly how charmingly she had danced. Nadine pulled herself together, the years of stern rule and discipline re-asserted their influence, and she sank upon the sofa beside this kind friend trembling all over, but bravely keeping back her tears.

"Papa—did not think I danced—well," she whispered, with a sob in her rather deep voice, which always had a husky note in it. "He was very angry—oh! dear Lady Crombie—why?"

"I think you imagined it, darling; we all admired you so much. Did the Russian mistress teach you, who was teaching my little nieces in London this

spring? but you have caught the spirit of the Russian dancing far better than they did."

"Russian? No, no one has ever taught me anything Russian. I have an old Frenchman from Yeominster every Saturday, Monsieur Peritet; we do all the positions and vales and one steps, but when Blenkie plays in the evenings I always dance by myself, and I make the dances up as I go on."

Lady Crombie took the little olive-ivory face in her hands, and looked kindly into the blue eyes.

"Are you lonely, dear little girl," she asked tenderly, "here in this great house, with no one to play with but your dogs?"

The tears welled up slowly now and brimmed over.

"I don't know; I suppose I am. I wouldn't be if everything I want to do was not wrong."

Some of the other guests came up then and joined them, and Lady Crombie could say no more; but when her husband came into her dressing-room as she was resting before dinner, she said to him:

"I think Ned is making a terrible mistake in the way he is suppressing that child; she wants love and kindness and understanding, not Miss Blenkinsop all the time."

Lord Crombie warmed his back at the fire: he was a whimsical old bird, and nothing much escaped him.

"There are two methods of dealing with savages; you beat them into submission, and they think you are a god; or you arouse their devotion, and they serve you as a slave. Nadine is half-savage, you know, and Ned is not the kind of nature to call forth much devotion—dear old pal that he is."



“I am glad you said *half* savage,” Lady Crombie retorted indignantly. “She is the sweetest, most tender-hearted little creature, and anything could be got out of her by sympathy and love; but they will drive her to wickedness before she is grown up—unless they crush the life and spirit out of her quite.”

“Ned has some pretty terrible memories with the mother, you know; nothing would tame her, she disgraced him at every moment, but he adored her to the end.”

“The more reason, then, that he should try to understand her child.”

“Well, I’ll give him a hint how the matter has struck you, Viola. Meanwhile, you’d better dress, or you will be late.”

But that night Nadine cried herself to sleep—and in her uneasy dreams she could always hear the “Red Sarafane.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The war produced very few changes at Pelham Court—beyond all the men-servants under fifty disappearing from view. Sir Edward returned to the Foreign Office, which he had retired from years before, and was often away on distant missions. Miss Blenkinsop worked at war comforts incessantly, and Nadine also. But Nadine hated sewing, she always longed to be a soldier, and go out and fight! It had one effect, however, which had strong influence upon the child’s character. Instead of her studies being continued in Dresden and Paris, as her father had planned, for six long years she and Miss Blenkinsop remained buried at Pelham Court. Decrepit elderly masters came down

from London, and did what they could, and Hester Blenkinsop herself was a person of great cultivation: so Nadine at the age of eighteen, when Sir Edward returned in 1920 from Japan, was a girl well polished in literature and the polite sciences; but of the world and life she was as absolutely ignorant as she had been at ten.

The first night she and her father dined together—Blenkie had a headache, and was in her bed—fortunately, Sir Edward felt! as he was able to study his child uninterruptedly during the meal. She had grown into a beautiful young woman—that was what jumped to the eyes at the first glance!—and with a something of fascination about her not easy to define. Was it her over-voluptuous mouth?—or the strange contrast of her bright blue eyes with that ivory-olive skin? She was still slender and childish-looking in figure, but somehow nothing of the child seemed to be left in her eyes. They were mysterious and passionate, and made people feel uneasy when they looked at them long.

Her manner was sullen, with bursts of *câlineries*—little fascinating caresses she bestowed upon her father and her beloved sheep-dogs from time to time.

“Papa, I am sick to death of Pelham Court. I loathe the country. I want now to go out and sample the world.”

“We must see about it, Nadine.”

“Which means you don’t intend to take me!” A rebellious light came into her eyes, although she still stood in absolute awe of her father, just as her mother Nada had done. There was something in the cold cynical regard of Sir Edward which froze most people,

and which dominated completely that savage half in Nadine. It was that part of her spirit which she had inherited from him which alone was able to stand against him, but that was not sufficiently developed yet to show! As she spoke, there came to her father the old feeling of fear—what would it mean when once she knew the world?

Marriage was the best thing which could happen to her—and fortunately a very suitable one could be arranged, for was not Eustace Pelham at home on leave from Rome, and if only the two young people could be brought together now, before Nadine had seen a choice of partners, the desire of his heart might be accomplished, and the family could go on through his daughter as well as his cousin's son. He would write to the Crombies, who were coming down next week for a farewell visit before they left on the mission to Washington, and ask them to bring Eustace with them; he had been one of Lord Crombie's secretaries in Teheran before going to Rome.

Sir Edward's eye then travelled to Nadine's simple dress. Yes she would look very different in some pretty Paris clothes. Lady Crombie, who knew all about these sorts of things, could be asked to bring some. She was in Paris now; he would write her a long letter to-night, there would yet be time. So with all these thoughts in his head he had not been paying much attention to Nadine, who had fallen into silence.

What would the return of her father mean? The years had seemed so long to her! These years of war and restriction, buried in the country, and he had come home so seldom! Of course he could not help that,



poor papa, he had to do his duty; but now war was over, and surely in the coming season he would take her up to London and let her enjoy life!

There was one book which Nadine loved: it was the story of the knight Bayard, "Sans peur et sans reproche." Miss Blenkinsop, while completely discouraging even the simplest novels, had had sense enough to see that such a nature as Nadine's *must* have some hero to worship, and when a beautifully illustrated copy of this admirable gentleman's adventures came down among birthday gifts for her pupil's fourteenth birthday, Miss Blenkinsop was delighted to encourage interest in it. In fact she looked upon the book as sent from heaven, for here was a romantic history absolutely devoid of any allusion to sex. Here was a knight whose love for the Lady of Frussasco could be dwelt on, and the beauty of it extolled. And in short, Bayard had been made to stand as a type of perfect man—and in Nadine's pure wild heart he became enshrined as king. She had built her own romance around him as she grew older, and now Bayard, for her, represented the lover who would come and set her free, who would take her far away from Blenkie and papa, and Pelham Court, out to see the world.

But the good knight would certainly not have recognized the picture her imagination had made of him, could he have returned to earth! When she thought of the future, it was invariably of some romantic meeting with her hero; and in some modern way she felt that she, too, would give a brodered sleeve to spur him on to victory! Perhaps he would be a politi-

cian, perhaps a soldier; but whoever he might be, she meant to be his star!

The book itself, with its beautiful binding, had become a sort of talisman; she had it always on her table near her—although now she seldom opened its leaves, and the real story of Bayard interested her no more.

\* \* \* \* \*

Her father's shrewd eyes were looking through and through her as they sat at dinner. Yes, it would not do to wait, or let her have a season in London; with the licence which had broken out since the war, there never would be any holding her when once she mixed with other young girls.

He realized that rebellious thoughts were coursing through her mind, and that it would be wiser to change their trend. So he exerted himself to amuse her—he drew her out, encouraged her to talk, and for the first time treated her as a grown-up responsible being. Nadine's ivory-olive cheeks flush with the pale scarlet tone which made her so brilliantly glowing whenever the least excitement or emotion moved her. Sir Edward's subtle sardonic wit had always made her a little uncomfortable. She knew as a child when he was being witty. She had a vague feeling that she ought to understand and smile, but she never did quite. She liked plain things, over which you could make no mistake about the fun of them. Nada had been wont to fly into ungovernable passions when Sir Edward laughed quietly, and Nadine had often longed to do so too. But to-night he made no allusions beyond her comprehension, and when she kissed him good-night, it was with more

affection, and good fellowship, than had ever been between them before.

Then Sir Edward sat down at his writing-table, and indited a long epistle to his friend Viola Crombie. He took both husband and wife into his confidence. He told of the wish of his heart, that Nadine should marry his heir—since the place was entailed, and went with the title—and asked for their co-operation. Eustace should be broached upon the subject, and his consent obtained to the idea—and then Lady Crombie should choose some becoming frocks in Paris for Nadine, and have them sent over; and finally in a fortnight, when they would be coming down to Pelham Court to pay a farewell visit before leaving for Washington, they should bring Eustace Pelham with them.

All this completed, Sir Edward addressed the envelope with a sigh of relief.

And Nadine opened her window wide on this gusty April night and held out her arms. She felt something new was coming towards her. She knew not what.



### CHAPTER III

ON the day, a fortnight later, when the Crombies and Eustace Pelham were expected, Nadine was having a wild gallop through the park. Old James, the groom who had accompanied her when on horseback since her childhood, had much ado to keep up with her.

“Mad as a March hare, is Miss Pelham sometimes, give you my word,” was how he expressed it. “She’s like a cat with the wind in its tail.”

The very fact of the Crombies arriving was a pleasure to Nadine, although she had heard nothing of Eustace. Anyone from the outside world made a change, and two of the dresses had come from Paris, and that was also a joy. But there was always Blenkie, watchful and restraining, and it was only when out with old James that Nadine ever got away from her. She might not hunt—that too was forbidden—but she could gallop to her heart’s content along Forwood Gorse and the West Down—with James behind her.

Sir Edward was sitting alone in the library—that lofty, oak-panelled room with its many books—things were shaping themselves. Lady Crombie had written that Eustace Pelham had taken kindly to the idea of an alliance with the daughter of the head of the family. He was quite of the opinion that it would be a good plan to keep fortune and property together and he would ask Nadine to become his wife on the first suitable moment during his visit.

“There is no romance about Eustace, Ned,” Lady

Crombie wrote, “ (you will say, of course, that that is a fortunate thing!)—he has seen too much of the world to retain any illusions, and he shares your views that marriage turns out more happily if based upon material suitability. You will be answerable for Nadine. I can only tell you, my dear old friend, that I am glad that it is not my part of the business, for perhaps Nadine will not like him at all, and upset the whole apple cart.”

When Sir Edward read this part of the letter he frowned a little, then he put it aside on the top of one that had come that morning from America. It had interested him, in the years since Nada died, to dabble a little in mines all over the world, and he had already acquired a cool million or two out of the Gold Stamp Mining Corporation in Nevada, which he owned jointly with one Elihu Bronson—an American millionaire. Bronson had written to say that the head mining engineer would come in on his way to catch the boat at Southampton, with the latest particulars. He had been in England on business. What a bore! the fellow might be turning up to-day.

Then when these two letters were safely in one drawer, another was unlocked, and Sir Edward drew out a jewel case which he had but yesterday got from the safe. He opened it, and his whole cynical face changed: back came the vision of Nada the Gipsy, and that wonderful night! How she had maddened his every sense, and *how* he had loved her! And what pleasure it had been to give her these jewels on their way through Paris, sapphires and diamonds—as blue and as bright as her eyes. And now they should all be Nadine’s—upon her wedding day. He half mur-

mured a prayer as he held up a necklace—to the spirit of Nada there in the Beyond—to help him to guide the destiny of their child who was growing so like—too like—her mother. Then, angry with himself he got up and rang the bell.

Cæsar, the golden collie, put his nose into his master's hand—Cæsar was one of the few living things which loved this stern reserved man. When the stately butler answered the summons, he was told to ask Miss Pelham to come into the library immediately on her return.

Pixie, Nadine's bay mare, had gathered a stone in the left forefoot. Nadine pulled up suddenly, and old James came to her side. It was the merest trifle—and when it was removed, off she tore again, almost upsetting the solemn groom, who mounted and followed her, shaking his head.

“Wind in its tail, wind in its tail,” he said to himself. But Nadine recked not a whit, but galloped ahead, hardly slackening until she came to the side entrance of the house—up the long carriage drive from the West Lodge, and there she sprang to the ground, and kissed Pixie's nose; and then played with her sheep-dogs who had rushed out to greet her—they were growing elderly gentlemen now. A gay frolicsome vital Pan-spirit! one would have said, could one have peeped at her. Even in the correct English habit she looked foreign, and nothing ever seemed able to keep back her crisp black curls.

She ran up the steps at last, and into the great hall. She was singing a merry tune; off went her hat on to the music stool, and the gloves followed. Then Mum-



ford, the portly butler who had ruled at Pelham Court before her birth, came forward.

Mumford adored her in his pompous heart, but felt often very apprehensive about her—so unlike the rest of the Pelham family!

“Sir Edward wishes to see you in the library, Miss,” he said.

Nadine banged the notes wildly as she stood with her back to the keys, and then she sat down on her hat. She had known and dreaded these summons to the library all her life, and Mumford knew it and sympathized with her secretly. What had she done now? Then she straightened her collar and her coat, and smoothed her curls, and walked soberly through the stone archway above which hung the banner a Pelham had carried at Agincourt, and so to the library door; while Mumford picked up the smashed-in bowler, and pressed out the crown—and he too shook his head.

“If he thinks he’ll ever tame her, he don’t know females,” was his reflection, as he carried off hat and gloves, to give them to the maid Augustine.

But Nadine had reached her father’s side, and was told to sit down. Her heart beat a little faster—he was so quiet, it was evidently something perfectly awful that she had done. Sir Edward felt nervous: how was he to begin?

The jewels were something to start from, so he opened the case, and Nadine’s eyes brightened with interest.

“These are your mother’s jewels, dear child,” he said, “and they are all to be yours—on your wedding day”; then he paused. The female delight in baubles



was overcoming Nadine: all primitive things affected her at this stage of her evolution. She had taken in that the jewels were to be hers—these lovely glittering things. She took them out and touched them tenderly, then she held a pendant up against her dark habit, and caressed a great pearl which fell from it—her father was talking again—and he was not scolding her—what was he saying? . . . Wedding day! . . . her cousin Eustace Pelham . . . coming to ask her to be his wife. . . . She dropped the necklace and clasped her hands. Bayard at last! coming to set her free! Oh! how altogether divine!

She bounded from the chair that she had drawn up meekly to her father's side, and hugged him.

“Oh! you darling old pet!—what's he like—Eustace?—when shall I see him? Oh, Papa!”

“In an half-hour from now, Nadine; run along and dress. You must do justice to being my daughter, and the mistress of this house.” It was characteristic of Sir Edward that “my daughter” and “the mistress of this house,” rather than “yourself” should be his phrasing. This was the keynote to his whole character. *His* daughter, and what was suitable to her—and the house of Pelham.

Nadine never analysed anything, she lived entirely in her emotions and sensations, spiritual and physical. She had been taught always to revere the house of Pelham—to believe in “Noblesse oblige,” to take great pride in her long line of ancestors—and that part of her which contained the influence of her father answered to this training; but it was only in outside things—within, she was yet as wild as a hawk, and entirely primi-

tive. A new experience was coming into her life—a knight!—the Bayard she had created—not he of the colourless romance with the Lady of Frussasco! but a glorious full-blooded passionate hero, who would love her and lead her forth into the world. Pleasure! mental and physical—and to put on one of the new frocks—pleasure again!

She tore through the hall, singing at the top of her voice, and on the stairs met Miss Blenkinsop coming down. Her hard face expressed the disapproval of so much exuberance, but she allowed herself to be pulled along and into Nadine's room—the dear old panelled Jacobean room which some eighteenth-century girl-Pelham had had painted white, and a later one a pale green.

It was a pleasant place with its old English chintzes, and its simple Chippendale furniture—pictures of the cats and dogs the owner loved were about, a photograph of Sir Edward adorned the dressing table, an ivory-bound Prayer Book lay on the table by the bed—and on another table drawn up to the sofa was *The Story of Bayard*—the perfect.

Winnie, an elderly black and tan terrier, had been sleeping beside the fireplace in her basket, but she got up to greet her mistress.

Nadine let go Blenkie, who had been dragged along, and seized her precious book—her fetish. The belief had come true—a real Bayard was arriving this very afternoon.

She dropped the volume again, after having clasped it ecstatically to her heart, and was now caressing Winnie and telling of her joy.

Miss Blenkinsop picked up the book; she greatly disapproved of these outbursts, so—so—theatrical—so un-English—and not quite in good taste; but when her eye caught *The Story of Bayard*, she felt relieved. That kind of love was just as it should be, so she retired from the room rather re-assured. And Nadine, left to herself, told everything to Winnie.

“ Bayard, my knight—coming at last to set me free, Winnie. But his name’s not Bayard—it’s Eustace ”—here she wrinkled her nose—“ E U S T A C E—do I like the name of Eustace?—not much—sounds awfully good, Winnie—not like you and me. But what’s in a name, my black beauty? We can call him ‘ Bayard ’ if we wish. ”

The noise of wheels was heard on the gravel. The windows of Nadine’s room looked out on that side entrance to which people always came when they were motoring from the station by the West Lodge. She could get a perfect view of arrivals.

In frantic excitement she rushed to the window—could it be—was it——?

Some one was getting out of a taxi, a man—a young man. Her heart beat very fast. He was a tallish person, clean cut and slim waisted. He was clean shaven too, and somehow his clothes did not look quite English. He glanced up at the house after he had given directions to the taxi man, and Nadine could see that he had a strong quiet face, and that his eyes were grey. She was so enthralled that she failed to take in the fact that he had no luggage beyond a small valise. The un-English something about his clothes might be because he was a diplomat and lived always abroad. Anyway



he looked like a gentleman—and—yes—he could very well be her knight. All the suppressed passionate unconscious desires of her half-savage nature arose suddenly. Oh! how divine to have a lover, and this one, tall and slim and strong! Nadine's heroes were not those whom she could rule. A hero must adore her, and do anything she pleased—of course; but if he chose, he must be able to make her obey him. He must have something of the lion-tamer about him as well as tenderness. That he should be clever—a man of brain—was a secondary consideration. He *must* be a ruler—and warmly fond. The man below at the door now bent to pat the two sheep-dogs, who had come out to sample the newcomer. "He likes dogs," commented Nadine. Then he disappeared into the house with the footman who had come to the door, and she turned excitedly to Winnie once more:

"He's a darling, Winnie, and I shall love him—I know."

Then she rang the bell excitedly, and when her maid came, she gave orders to see both her new frocks; and while Augustine went to fetch them, she literally tore off her habit, and danced about the room, wrapping herself in a pink satin dressing-gown.

Yes, the pale grey frock was a triumph of simplicity, and nice and short; she would put that on. Then when presently Augustine brought shoes and stockings for her to change, she kicked the little pink satin *mules* she had thrust her toes into, right up to the ceiling, and one fell on the maid's head.

"Tiens! mademoiselle," protested Augustine, highly irritated; but Nadine was blissfully indifferent. Then



her hair had to be specially neatly arranged; something told her she must not annoy her father in any way, and finally getting the maid out of the room for a moment, she searched for, and found, a tiny box of face powder which lived concealed in the strapping of the cushion of a chair, and with Winnie watching her sympathetically, she carefully rubbed her face with the minute puff. This powder was a delightful secret. She had bought it one day at the chemist's in Yeominster, when Blenkie's back was turned, and the little box appealed to her fancy. She had never put it on before to go downstairs, but surely when one was going to meet one's future husband, one had every right to make oneself look as beautiful as possible! Her skin, pure and fine as ivory, with its olive tinge, was velvety enough without any adornment. And finally, very pleased with herself but a little nervous, she started to go to the library, where tea would soon be coming, and all the guests arrived.

Meanwhile the young man who had come in the taxi was being taken by Henry, the first footman, and delivered into the hands of Mr. Mumford in the great hall. He presented a long-shaped envelope and was asked to wait a moment, by the big fireplace, while the letter was taken to the master of the house in the library.

Sir Edward was still sitting in his chair gazing in front of him as when Nadine had left him a few moments before.

He read the missive quietly. It was from his partner Elihu Bronson, and introduced Mr. Bayard Delaval, head mining engineer of the Gold Stamp Mining Corporation, who, the writer said, was a Harvard man,

one of the younger Delavals of Washington, and one of the cleverest mining experts out west. He would explain how necessary it was that Sir Edward should come out to America this spring, and take a trip out to Gold Stamp to see how things were progressing for himself.

“Ask Mr. Delaval to come in, Mumford,” Sir Edward said; and in a moment Bayard Delaval made his entrance. He had been taking in things while he waited. It must mean much, this old house with its accumulation of associations covering hundreds of years.

How much tradition must mean as a principle of action! How it should make those who had inherited all this come up to scratch! How would he feel if these were his ancestors looking down at him from the walls? “Delaval” was quite as old a name as “Pelham,” they had come from Northamptonshire to Virginia about two hundred years ago. He must look the history up some day—when he had time—his father had always made such a study of it, and he had had a kind of feeling that he must be worthy of it—and then he closed his strong fine hand. A man’s spirit and his will to do, mattered more than any ancestors in the world though, he decided, and then followed Mumford into Sir Edward’s presence.

Above everything Sir Edward was a man of the world—cynical and cold, but punctiliously polite in his own house. He greeted Mr. Delaval cordially, and they talked for a little, keeping strictly to business; then, warming to the young man, he asked him would not he stay?

“Do let me persuade you to stop over the weekend,” he said.

It was a real temptation to Bayard Delaval. He had never seen a great English house before; it was his first visit to Europe, and novelty interested him. A keen psychologist, he was accustomed to analyse the meaning of things, and realized that these old families, with their hereditary points of view, were worth studying.

“They made all the finer civilization of the present world,” he was thinking, “even if they are now passing away.”

To him, Sir Edward was a study of a waning order of things. To Sir Edward, he was a worthy young mining engineer, who appeared to be quite a gentleman.

He could not stay, he was sorry to say. He must catch the *Mauretania* at Southampton; but they would meet again out west in Nevada, he hoped, very shortly.

When he had gone, Sir Edward mused to himself: the fellow had charm—his not staying might be just as well.

Then the Crombies arrived—and—Eustace Pelham.

Diplomacy seems to stamp people more strongly than any other profession. No one could mistake Lord Crombie for anything but an old diplomat, or Eustace Pelham for anything but a young one.

“Quite one of the family, but a trifle over-bred,” Sir Edward thought, as he looked at his heir. “It won’t hurt our descendants to have Nadine’s half plebeian blood balancing things.”

Eustace was groomed to perfection, and had an indifferent aloof manner—the social duties of a diplo-



matic career had never been neglected by him. He was the adored of cosmopolitan female society in the different capitals he had already been appointed to. He liked exotic women—and never spoke to girls. But one must marry some time, and it were better to have a wife with a fortune than otherwise. His cousin Nadine was too young ever to hamper his freedom in any way, and not too much would be expected of him. He had brought a diamond engagement ring down with him, and meant to go through with the thing as arranged.

“Beastly nuisance, of course,” he decided; “but then any tie is a nuisance.”

They were already in the library when Nadine came slowly down the stairs. Her heart was beating so she felt that she could hardly be sure of controlling her voice. Her father’s golden collie met her and walked with her through the hall. She paused a moment at the library door, and then went in.

She hardly dared to look up at a tall figure which stood beyond her father, and eagerly greeted Lady Crombie near the door.

“How you have grown, dear,” her old friend said, as she kissed her; “and how weirdly attractive you have become,” she added to herself. Then Lord Crombie gave his greetings, and finally Sir Edward drew the man behind him forward, and Nadine raised her blue eyes and looked at him—and over her face there came a blank stare. . . .

This—this could not be—Eustace?—Eustace whom she had seen out of her window, arriving. Eustace—who was to be Bayard—her knight!



She could have cried—screamed aloud—in her disappointment. The namby-pamby man! She got suddenly very pale, and she hardly heard her father's voice saying:

“This is your cousin Eustace, Nadine, dear child; you have never met before, but I want you to be very good friends.” Then she felt a nerveless, indifferent hand take her cold little fingers, but she could not force herself to speak a word.

Old Lord Crombie put his eyeglass in his eye and observed things.

“Ned has got a stiff proposition to put forward there,” he reflected sagely.

And then the servants brought in the tea, and every one talked at once, and Nadine's silence passed unnoticed.

But when she reached her room again and called Winnie from her basket, she burst into passionate tears.

## CHAPTER IV

WHO was the man she had seen out of the window? this was the thought which troubled Nadine next day. Why did no one speak of an arrival? Visitors were of rare enough occurrence. And such a visitor! How had he come and gone, and no one commented upon it? She would have to ask her father straight out, it would seem.

But Sir Edward was in one of his unapproachable moods, when it was impossible to say anything to him that he did not want to hear. So, driven to desperation, Nadine spoke to Blenkie:

“Did you know some one came yesterday when I was dressing to go down to tea, Blenkie—a gentleman—who was he?”

“I heard of no one, Nadine.”

How could she find out? She could of course ask Mumford. As he passed her in the hall she put her question:

“Who was it who arrived by the side door yesterday afternoon in a taxi from the West Lodge, Mumford?”

The butler was astonished, and a little shocked; anyone who was not in *Burke's Peerage* or the *County Families* was to him a person of no importance, unless of course he happened to be a foreigner of known distinction; but a mining engineer who came with a letter to Sir Edward was not of a status in life that Miss Pelham of Pelham Court should take an interest

in. He did not hold with any of these modern democratic notions. He knew his place, and he wished other people knew theirs. He spoke loftily when he answered—in the tone which used to make Nadine pull faces at him behind his back when she was a tiny child:

“He was from Sir Edward’s American mine, Miss—on business.”

“On . . .” and Nadine’s voice was full of disappointment. “Are you sure, Mumford? I thought it was a gentleman.”

“They do tell me, Miss, that every one is the same there; but I did not stand no nonsense of that sort from my nephew when he came back last year. If a man works in mines, he is a miner, and there is no more to it, Miss,” and Mr. Mumford drew himself up with the dignity of a pouter pigeon.

Nadine went on her way.

So he was only a miner—her knight Bayard! Mary the head housemaid’s brother was a miner in Wales. Oh, what a terrible pity!

At this stage of her evolution her training still held her so strongly, that it never entered her head that she could continue her interest in the stranger. It was as if she had taken a statue for a real person, and finding out her mistake felt very disappointed, but of course did not think of trying to animate the marble.

Her clearest thought was that it was a terrible pity that such a nice-looking person couldn’t have been a gentleman, and that she couldn’t have known such a one instead of Eustace. Her mind still affected by the charm of her supposed knight, she had found her cousin

a hideous disillusion at dinner on the evening before, and afterwards, in the drawing-room, she could see nothing but his faults. Lady Crombie felt very uncertain as to the wisdom of the course that they were all taking, but she never gave unmasked advice, and having promised her old friend that she would help him, she meant to keep her word.

And so a week went by, and the outstanding conviction which settled down into the brain of Nadine was that resistance was hopeless: it was either Eustace and the world, or Blenkie and Pelham Court for ever. She had moments when she was like a fierce caged animal, growling to itself, but just as the wild beast knows and obeys its keeper, so she put up no fight to her father—and then some other part of her nature came uppermost, and suggested to her that freedom was worth any price she might be asked to pay for it; even to the meek acceptance of Eustace as a husband. But the Pan-spirit in her could not resist playing pranks—she was infinitely irritating to Eustace. She made obvious jokes, she was capricious, she raced her horse always ahead of him when they rode together. She lagged behind when they walked; she clung to Lady Crombie's skirts whenever there seemed to be a prospect of being alone with him, and when he was not exasperated, he was bored to death. Nadine's was not the type which drew him; the fascinations which would have driven another man crazy, left Eustace Pelham completely cold. He thought her a silly excitable tomboy, and felt an amount of self-pity that he should have to take unto himself such a wife; but he had come there prepared to ask her to marry him,



and did not mean to be turned aside from his purpose; for after all marriage was a shackle and no pleasure, however you looked at it.

“Of course when she sees how absurd she is, among the delightful, civilized people in Rome, she will change,” he reflected, as he stroked his little moustache, or settled his immaculate white tie; but he could not always hide his boredom with her.

Then Nadine became piqued. Even to her perceptions, which were not of the keenest, it was evident that Eustace was unattractive. She—the woman—meant nothing to him. He was only going to marry her because she was her father’s daughter, and once more the overpowering influence of Sir Edward seemed to crush her. Then, some dormant sense of desire for conquest was aroused in her; she must get away from being a nonentity. Why could she not make this man feel? Perhaps, though, it was because he could not feel; perhaps he was just as wooden as he looked, or was it something wanting in herself?

She was very quiet that day when she thought of these things. Sir Edward was growing anxious. Lady Crombie had been asked to inform Miss Blenkinsop in regard to the affair, and the two ladies talked things over.

Blenkie was of opinion that Mr. Pelham had better get his proposal made as soon as possible.

“If Nadine once *determined* she won’t accept him, there would be no use in going on; he had better clinch the matter while she is still undecided.”

Lady Crombie agreed with her, and felt that she herself ought to make the opportunity, that very night after dinner. They would have their coffee in the great

hall as usual, and then she would get her husband to draw Sir Edward on into the library, where she would join them, and the young people would be left alone.

Blenkie spoke to Nadine before dinner when she came into her room, and found her pupil putting on a fresh new frock from Paris.

“What a charming young man Mr. Pelham is, Nadine,” she said, letting herself go in spite of the presence of Augustine; “he is so refined and gentlemanlike, it is a pleasure to be in his company.”

“I am glad you think so,” snapped Nadine. “I wish papa wanted to marry you to him instead of me. I think him a stick, stick . . . stick . . . don’t I, Winnie?” and she picked up her favourite and swung her round. “I hate everything about him; I want to rumple his hair, and untie his ties, and upset my soup plate over his splendidly creased trousers; but I am going to marry him all right. Never fear, Blenkie.”

“Nadine!” was all Miss Blenkinsop could utter, and walked in grim dignity from the room.

At dinner, Miss Pelham behaved as Miss Pelham should. She was sweet and not jerky, she talked nicely to Eustace, and said how much she longed to visit Rome and study its antiquities. Lady Crombie and Sir Edward exchanged glances—the moment seemed propitious. Eustace must be given a hint to propose to her that evening if the idea did not seem to be presenting itself naturally. Only Lord Crombie had a whimsical smile in his old eyes.

Then Lady Crombie arranged things beautifully. When she and the young people were alone in the

great hall—she must fetch some photographs to show them, she said, and she refused Nadine's eager offer to get them or ring and have them brought, and on the stairs she stopped Blenkie from interrupting the tête-à-tête. This worthy creature had gone up to get her beloved knitting—and the two ladies disappeared into the gallery above.

Nadine sat down at the piano and began idly touching the keys. Sir Edward and Lord Crombie came through the hall and went into the library. Eustace felt he had better get it over! He had been carrying the engagement ring in his pocket continuously since his arrival. Nadine knew it was coming—this only key to freedom! So she controlled herself as well as she could, and when she had finished a fox-trot that she was playing, she twisted round upon the music seat and faced him, as he reclined in the most comfortable arm-chair near. He settled his collar for a minute, and then he began:

“It was awfully nice of Sir Edward arranging this marriage for us, Nadine, wasn't it? I'll be a very lucky fellow if you'll take me.”

He hardly glanced at her while he took the engagement ring case from his waistcoat pocket, and began removing the ring—a big diamond one—from its white velvet bed.

Nadine did not speak; she nodded her head. Her heart seemed to be very still. It was all so terribly matter-of-fact—this, the turning point in her life!

In a supercilious indifferent way Eustace took one of her hands, which were loosely clasped in her lap—it



happened to be the right one! and he began putting the ring upon the third finger. Nadine realized the mistake with its inference of his indifference, and she drew back a little indignantly.

“By Jove! I was putting it on the wrong hand,” Eustace exclaimed, laughing rather fatuously. “How awfully stupid of me!”

“Yes,” and she gave him her left one. She felt frozen, and, rather laboriously, Eustace placed the diamond upon the engagement finger and kissed her hand coldly, and so the thing was done! Then he subsided complacently back into his chair again and flicked a scrap of fluff from his sleeve with his over-bred delicate fingers. A wild resentment filled Nadine. Was this the way proposals were made in that aristocratic Pelham world to which she had the misfortune to belong? And then a vision came of the face of the man who had looked up to her from the side door! Oh! what a pity, pity, pity, Eustace was not he!

Nothing further seemed to be going to happen. Her fiancé had the expression of duty bravely done, and well-earned rest ahead in that nice chair! Nadine looked at him furiously, and then bounded up from her seat and walked quickly towards the library, leaving him, surprised and disconcerted, to follow more slowly.

Sir Edward and Lord Crombie were talking together, as they warmed their backs by the blazing logs, and they looked up expectantly as the excited little figure burst into the room, and Nadine came forward and took her father's arm, hiding a moved, flushed face against his coat. Then Sir Edward noticed the ring,



and taking her hand showed it to his old friend with a triumphant and benevolent smile.

Eustace had reached them by this time, and there were congratulations all round. But as they went off to bed later on Lord Crombie remarked:

“You are taking chances, Ned. The days are late for the disposal of daughters willy-nilly. This is only the first act of the comedy, my dear boy.”

Sir Edward frowned.

## CHAPTER V

**O**H! the weary days that followed! The Crombies had to leave on the Saturday, and the fiancés, but for the watchful eyes of Blenkie, would be much alone. Nadine used to get away after breakfast as soon as possible, on one pretext or another, then she would ride with Eustace just before lunch. Their paces were never the same, they tried to talk, but nothing either said really interested the other. Nadine felt always at a disadvantage. She was never natural, and had the humiliating feeling that however nice Eustace was trying to be to her, he really looked upon her as a thing of naught whose views and opinions could not matter to anyone. Once or twice he let her see that he thought her primitive, and with instincts not in accordance with the people of their world. When she was the least exuberant his face was a study! not exactly of disapproval, but a patient endurance that grown-up people display towards noisy children, or puppies! She worried him with her life and energy. She could so easily slip into what he would have called "bad form."

He had not had the slightest desire to kiss her. He felt it would be like kissing some tiresome little boy: a peck at her hand in a ceremonious way, as they said good-night, was as far as he had ventured. He would have to be a little more lover-like, he supposed, but how she had got on his nerves! every giggle—and Nadine sometimes giggled from sheer nervousness—made him wince. She was not a clever conversationalist, because

the real methods of deductive reasoning had always been discouraged in her by the worthy Blenkie, in case she should ask logical and awkward questions. So with all her outward polish in literature, she did not seem to possess the key to make it interesting. Every bit of the real soul of the girl was suppressed; her true nature kept in abeyance, and with Eustace she was always self-conscious.

She wondered and wondered what life would be like with him when they were married, and went off to Rome. He would begin making some kind of love to her, she supposed. What would it be like? She was too innocent and ignorant to make any mental picture. Her imagination got so far as Eustace taking her into his arms and kissing her and there came a thrill, but it was always because Eustace's face had changed into that of the stranger at the side door. She was really answering to the romantic spring-time thoughts of her nature, and Eustace was only a peg upon which she hung them. After the thrill had passed, and she realized that it was Eustace who would one day caress her, and not her dream knight, then a blank horrible deadness settled upon her, and she would be silent for hours.

The evenings in the library were the same, night after night. Sir Edward read the *Century Magazine*, or the *Saturday Review*, Blenkie knitted one of her eternal pairs of socks—the war habit was still upon her, Eustace smoked innumerable cigarettes, and when Nadine had played as many tunes as she was able to remember, she sat silent stroking the collie Cæsar's ears, and made a bolt for bed at a quarter to ten! All subjects of conversation by then seemed exhausted.

After a fortnight of this sort of thing, when every force of the fresh May spring-time seemed calling for romance, the strain began to tell upon her physical health. And the old family doctor, who had come up to Pelham Court to see an ailing housemaid, was struck by her appearance when they met on the stairs. He was perhaps the only person who really apprehended the nature of Nadine, or had any sympathy for her. He paused and had a chat, and then he went into the library to see Sir Edward.

He spoke his mind quite freely. The girl wanted a change. Take her away somewhere and let her have some different air and new interests.

Sir Edward was much concerned. He had intended that the wedding should take place soon after Whitsuntide, he said, and they would be going over to Paris to get the trousseau next week. But old Doctor Wilson shook his head.

“Do not marry her off just yet, I pray of you, Sir Edward. Why not take her for a trip round the world first?”

Sir Edward looked the doctor straight in the eyes.

“I have got to go to America on business, to inspect a mine I have out there in Nevada. I had intended to start after the wedding; you would advise perhaps that I go sooner, and take my daughter and her fiancé with me?”

Doctor Wilson was of opinion that this would be an excellent plan, and the sooner they could get off the better. So that evening at dinner Sir Edward made known his decision.

Nadine could not suppress her joy. They had



reached the dessert stage, and she was eating big forced strawberries, as red as her lips. She brandished one monster, and then took bites at it, while she held it high.

“Oh! Papa, you darling! Oh! how perfectly divine!” and she rushed from her chair and kissed him.

Sir Edward thrilled a little in spite of himself. It was all so like Nada when she was pleased about anything, but it was too unconventional for the Pelham standard. Miss Blenkinsop reddened with annoyance. These unseemly outbursts of Nadine's reflected upon her teaching. Why had she to bound from her chair just because she was told she would be taken to America! Ladies did not leave their seats until the mysterious signal for rising and retiring to the drawing-room was given!

This American-trip plan suited Eustace admirably. He had three months' leave from his diplomatic duties in Rome, and he liked travelling; and the charming and sophisticated American ladies he had met in various capitals of Europe would welcome him, he knew. He was in no hurry for the wedding to take place!

Thus it was that this highly respectable English family found themselves on board a great liner by the beginning of June, with their pompous personal servants, and Blenkie, and heaven knows how many English leather trunks and bags, along with them! And for the first time in her life Nadine Pelham felt free.

Free to rise early before Blenkie—who shared the large state-room of their suite with her—was awake, and race round the upper boat deck with some children who played there. Free to make a noise with them.

Free to pretend that she was sleepy in the afternoon and lie with half-closed blue eyes and dream.

It was unlikely that a business trip to a mining country could be too socially diverting for her, Sir Edward felt, and with Blenkie to watch over her, no harm could possibly come of it, and if the poor child's health would be benefited by the change of air, it was just as well they had started. At that time of the year there were very few interesting people travelling back to America, and Sir Edward Pelham was not of the type who makes casual acquaintances.

The band on board played Russian music in the restaurant, and it seemed to awaken something fierce in Nadine. Her little nostrils began to quiver, and her feet unconsciously marked time as they tapped the floor. This was on the second night out.

At the next table a couple of men sat alone; one was the typical friend of the very rich, who can be seen on every great liner and every Ritz Hotel all the world over—one of those people who know every one by sight, and all the little stories about them, even if they do not claim intimate acquaintance. The other was a millionaire by the name of Hopper—Howard B. Hopper—a fabulously rich person, who had inherited a fortune made in liquid manure, and had augmented it by adding a glue factory for waste by-products. His foot—a large fat one—was not yet firmly planted upon the social ladder in New York and Washington. But he had just bought an old house on the outskirts of the latter city, and was going to turn it into a palace.

Howard B. Hopper believed in money—it had always been able to buy him what he wanted in life:

whether it was a woman or a horse or a motor-car, or a house of a poor aristocratic southern family who had grown too impoverished to live in it.

Self-indulgence stamped every line of his unctuous personality.

Nadine Pelham attracted him extremely. Her exotic type showing through the breeding she had inherited from her father, made a rare combination, he thought. That was the kind of wife he meant to throw the handkerchief to presently. He meant to take a first place in European society, also; he had been over looking round, and he had determined he would do the thing well, and get an English wife with a peck of ancestors behind her, who would open the innermost doors to him. No scrambling for Howard B. Hopper! He gave his orders to Terry Potter:

“I want to become acquainted with that little cutie over there, Terry. I’ve had my eye *on* her since the ship left. The head steward tells me her father’s *some* swell, and they’ve never been to God’s country before. They’re on their way to California now, but I want to sample the brand before they leave New York . . . .”

But for once the gods were not on the side of the millionaire. No machinations of the astute Terry could secure an introduction. Eustace was taking a rest cure, and slept most of the day in his state-room, and it would have taken the pluck and assurance of a toy Pekinese to endeavour to scrape acquaintance with Sir Edward!

So Mr. Howard B. Hopper could only stare afar for the rest of the voyage, and vent his annoyance upon the discomfited friend of the very rich.



“ There is an impossible bounder, Miss Blenkinsop, sitting at the next table to us in the restaurant, who looks at Nadine. See that she is never unattended,” were Sir Edward’s orders to Blenkie.

So for the last three days of the voyage the feeling of freedom which Nadine had been revelling in began to lessen, and by the time they reached New York, the old sense of being a prisoner had settled down upon her again.

Her father and Eustace stood on each side of her as they all watched the entrance to New York harbour. Nadine’s excitement was intense. She was going to land in a new country, where she had heard girls did as they pleased.

Mr. Bronson and his daughter, Sadie, were on the dock to meet them, and Nadine was enchanted at the thought of meeting some one young and of this free nation. There was very little Sadie Bronson did not know about life, except how to make it satisfy her. Everything she had wanted, her father had given her, until now. But one of her friends in California had married a French marquis of undoubted position and prestige, and Sadie felt that she must marry a European aristocrat also.

Eustace’s type pleased her; there could be no mistake as to what breed he belonged to, and as Sadie meant to rule whatever husband she selected, absence of backbone and presence of “ race ” seemed just what was required.

It annoyed her to find out before they all reached the Plaza Hotel that he was already engaged to Nadine.

They were to be only the one night in New York,



as the heat was intense, and they would start for Chicago the following day and join Mr. Bronson's private car there to take them along the Santa-Fé to Ludlow, and thence branch off to Nevada.

Nadine did hope her father would not insist upon their dining in a private room; she longed to see a restaurant and watch the people, and fortunately the Bronsons took her view.

New York out of the season is no gayer than any other city in like case; but to Nadine Pelham to walk up the steps into the restaurant seemed like entering Paradise. She looked quite different to anyone else always—whether you admired her or not, you were bound to admit that.

“She certainly is cute,” Sadie Bronson said to her father. “But I like my old dad better than hers,” and she hugged him.

That Eustace was an engaged man did not altogether prevent Sadie endeavouring to attract him, and she said some lively things to entertain him during dinner.

The lights and the music had an effect upon Nadine: she blossomed forth and was gay and natural, and Mr. Bronson thought her a charming person. A young man friend of Sadie's joined the party when they went to take their coffee in the hall, and at once Sadie suggested that they should go into the ball-room and dance. Nadine's eyes began to flash with excitement; would her father let her do this unheard-of thing? He seemed to be making no objection, and off they started. The room was half empty, and Sadie thought it a miserable one-horse out-of-season show, but to

Nadine it was a whirl of excitement. She would dance for the first time with a *man!*

Eustace had already asked Sadie, and they were going ahead in a fox-trot, and the young man who had joined them placed his arm round Nadine. Her feet felt as if they were shod in Mercury's sandals, her lithe body swayed to the syncopated rhythm, her blue eyes flashed fiercely. She knew not what steps she was dancing, she only knew that she was in heaven far away from ordinary things. And Sir Edward found it difficult to keep his attention on what Mr. Bronson was saying, in his alarmed interest in his child. For if ever temperament unconsciously proclaimed itself it was doing so now. Even the unemotional brotherly young American who was her partner woke up and decided this was *some* girl.

Would Eustace be able to hold her? Would anyone ever be able to do so? Sir Edward wondered, only as he had held Nada, with passionate love and fierce mastery. But death had taken her at the end of two years; what would life bring to Nadine?

When the music stopped, she came up to him a radiant brilliant flower; all her diffidence had departed, for the first time she felt that she was attractive and was influencing men.

"It is just too divine to dance, Papa," she whispered. "I never want to go back to England and dull old home."

The young American was a perfect dancer, like most of his race, and the vast difference Nadine found in Eustace, when his turn came, brought her sharply back

to earth again. He had no idea of rhythm, and went round in measured time.

“Oh, it is no use,” she said at last, exasperated, and stopped abruptly in the middle of the floor.

Her betrothed was surprised, but wanted to be kind.

“Of course you cannot expect to know how to dance, Nadine, as this is only your first time; but do not be discouraged, my dear child: after a little practice you will get into it and learn to keep time.”

Then she went into one of her fits of laughter, to Eustace's annoyed dismay.

“Why, it is you who have not a notion of what dancing means,” she panted. “One might as well go round with an old broom.”

Mr. Pelham drew himself up stiffly. An altercation would be in deplorable taste, but such impoliteness could not be permitted to pass unremarked.

“I am sorry you find me like an old broom; let us go and sit down until the new one can again sweep you off your feet.”

Oh, how like her father he looked when he said that!—the same sarcastic freezing tone; between the two of them, everything which gave her any pleasure in life was always spoilt.

And with a pettish shrug she took refuge at Sir Edward's side.

“Why are you not dancing, my dear?” he asked, feeling that some jar had occurred.

“Because Eustace thinks I cannot dance, and I think he cannot—so we have decided to sit down.”

Fortunately at that moment Sadie Bronson came up, and the two girls changed partners again.



And while Sir Edward watched his daughter his thoughts were troubled.

She and Eustace did not seem to agree over one single thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

When later on Nadine looked out of her window on the fourteenth floor of the Plaza, for the first time in her life she began to realize that there were new forces awakening in her nature, and that she was not accepting everything dumbly. The ache for life and love and gaiety was positive and definite. Not just a nameless pain, which made her unhappy. She knew not why. The weird effect of the starlit summer sky, and the tall buildings cut sharply against it, appealed to her. These strange high towers of a new enchanted land, shooting up to express themselves above their fellows, gave her comfort, they seemed to be in sympathy with her new aspirations. The unusual noises coming from the city and the docks—strange whistles from the sirens of ships—seemed the cries of prisoners who, like herself, were making an effort to be free. She stepped back into the room, and the rose-coloured silk curtains brushed against her face, as she passed, like a caress. She smoothed her cheek against them, and then buried her face in the huge bunch of American Beauty roses which Mr. Bronson and Sadie had sent to welcome her. And to-morrow there would be another change, further adventures to look forward to. Life was, after all, not such an impossible affair!

Sadie Bronson in another room was undergoing no exotic emotions. She was coolly calculating the chances which had come her way. Nadine Pelham was a mere



baby in every respect, not as experienced in worldly knowledge of men and things as an American child of ten. She was obviously not in love with her fiancé. The fiancé was obviously not in love with her; there could be no possible harm in attracting him away from her. What was to the advantage of the Pelham family interested Sadie not a jot. She knew the whole situation from her father. How the place was entailed, and went with the title. She had millions of her own to replace Nadine's and life with a promising diplomat in the capitals of Europe while they were young, and a great position in England later on, was exactly her affair, and she would be mad to lose the chance of it, since she was twenty-five years old! And after this decision she went to bed, and slept the sleep of the just, until the morning.

Eustace smoked for an hour. Nadine had wounded his vanity, and the only emotion he was conscious of now towards her was one of resentment. Should he be able to go through with the thing, or would he have to throw it all over in spite of its many advantages?

Sir Edward sat with his head in his hands. What might happen even if the marriage to Eustace was safely accomplished? Marriage did not control temperaments or lessen temptations, as he very well knew; and when at last he fell asleep some hours later, it was to have uneasy dreams of Nada. He re-lived once more the deep humiliations she had caused him.

Of the whole party Mr. Bronson was the only one who retired to rest in perfect tranquillity after he had written out a telegram to the Chief Mining Engineer of the Gold Stamp Mining Corporation to meet the private car at Albuquerque some days hence.

## CHAPTER VI

EVERYTHING about America pleased Nadine. She liked its newness, and its noise, and its rush, and its life; they drove about New York in the morning and saw as much as they could. The people in the train going to Chicago looked so jolly, and the coloured porters and the waiters in the restaurant delighted her. Here, nobody would be bothering about etiquette, and everybody was smiling. Even the noisy, badly-behaved children, running up and down the car, did not irritate her. A new animation was entering her being.

Miss Blenkinsop disapproved of *everything*, and watched, from the open door of their drawing-room with infinite dismay, the darkie porter arranging the sleeping accommodation for the night!

People of both sexes were going to sleep underneath those green curtains! And if one did not happen to have money enough to secure a drawing-room, one would be obliged to expose oneself to all kinds of dangers! Blenkie felt her maiden cheeks growing crimson, with the sudden thought of how she would ever be able to climb into bed, supposing a man had taken the lower berth! How fortunate that Sir Edward shared her views, and would never grudge the expense to secure the ladies of his party against any such distressing possibilities as could easily occur had they to travel in the general car! She hardly liked the idea of even Augustine running such risks!

Nadine revelled in the new adventure. When they came back from the restaurant to their drawing-room, and the usual sight presented itself, of humanity trying to undress as best it could behind bulging green baize, she had the greatest difficulty to control her mirth until they arrived at their compartment, when she shook with laughter.

“Blenkie, aren't they delicious!” she exclaimed. “Oh, don't you adore being here!”

But Miss Blenkinsop closed the door reprovingly.

Next day in Chicago was another pleasure for Nadine. More restaurants, more life, and movement!

“What are they pouring out of those flasks they are taking from their pockets?” she asked Sadie Bronson, looking over to a party of merry young men and maidens:

“Why, just whisky, of course. We have to do that because of Prohibition; don't you see, people always want to do what they are told they must not.”

“You feel that here?” asked Nadine. “Oh! I think I must be really an American, then—I always want to do what I am forbidden!”

Sadie Bronson sighed.

“And in the end I get not to want anything, because I can have everything so easily—that is why I am going to make Papa take me to Europe this fall. I want a new sensation; I want to feel that there is forbidden fruit, not just only forbidden things to drink.”

“But if you lived where everything you wanted really was forbidden, what would you do?”

“It would be just glorious; there would be something to exist for, in planning to get out!”



This was a new view for Nadine, and it comforted her; but it also made her think. Did she want some particular thing, or was it just freedom to indulge her personality? Or was there really something wonderful in life that both she and Sadie were missing?

When they got on to the private car, her delight was to sit on the observation platform at the end, and watch the country slipping away into perspective. She had a charming little compartment all to herself to sleep in, and when every one was taking a siesta after lunch, in the great heat as they began to get into the desert, she took out the story of Bayard—the book went everywhere with her, even though she had not really read it for several years. No, it was not this Bayard she wanted. Eustace, if he had a nicer character, could be this kind of knight. A man to make her love him must be much more—she hardly knew how to express it—more affectionate, more dashing, more of a master. Would she ever meet such an one? When it was too late? Then she fell asleep and dreamed of snakes.

Just before they were due at Albuquerque a day or so after, the usual game of bridge was going on. Eustace was a tiresome player, taking a long time to make up his mind, and even Sadie grew impatient with him; while, if Nadine was his partner, she drummed her fingers on the table. Fortunately she felt the confined conditions of a private car did not make *tête-à-tête* inevitable. If one wanted that, one would have to arrange it with intelligence, as Sadie did to secure Eustace in the starlight after dinner. Nadine was so absorbed with her own desire not to be with him, that she had not observed Miss Bronson's machinations; but



Blenkie had, and had determined now to defeat them. Blenkie and her eternal knitting never seemed absent from the young people's horizon—only Sadie was more than a match for her, and often saw Eustace alone.

On this particular morning, Mr. Bronson made the fourth at this game of bridge, while Sir Edward wrote letters and Blenkie knitted.

Suddenly Sadie looked up and cried excitedly :

“ Oh! here we are in the Indian country. Come along and look at them when we get into the station at Albuquerque! ”

Nadine rushed to her compartment for her camera, and after they had drawn up she climbed down from the car at the other door.

Eustace and Sadie were far down the platform by now, buying trinkets of Indian silver. Blenkie was looking anxiously from the door, having lost sight of her charge.

Sir Edward and Mr. Bronson had not emerged from the drawing-room. Nadine, in delight at being alone, went up under one of the archways to photograph a squaw and a little papoose who, for a dollar-piece for the baby's hand, were induced to pose.

Just as Nadine had fixed the sight to take the photograph, a tall young man came through the arch from the bookstall and paused for a moment, as if looking for some particular part of the train; he was exactly in focus, and the flash of recognition which came to Nadine coincided with the snap of the shutter.

This was the same face which had looked up at her from the side-door entrance at Pelham Court, only six weeks before.

The young man was quite unconscious of having got in the way, until the squaw indignantly waved him aside, and then he realized what he had done; and, with a murmured apology and a raise of the cap, he walked on.

Nadine gazed after him, forgetting to take another photograph. Where was he going?—far on to their part of the train?

The chattering of the squaw diverted her attention for one moment, and when she looked again she had lost sight of the man. With a feeling of annoyance she posed the Indian once more, and then walked briskly along the platform to join Eustace and Sadie. The time was nearly up, they would have to be returning to the car.

Before she could join them she caught sight of the young man again; he was carrying a small valise now. She watched intently, he was certainly going to get on to the train. Oh, what a pity that he wasn't a gentleman, and that they would never meet—but what was this? He was actually entering their private car! A delicious feeling of excitement came over her. Who—who could he be? What if Mumford was mistaken and he was a gentleman after all? Even in the few days since she had landed in America, she had become aware that it was not only the Army, the Church or the Bar that society people honoured by adorning! Every one they had met was in some business or another, and a gentleman who had dined with the party in Chicago even owned an hotel!

All this was very hopeful, but she had not time for much reflection; the porter was beckoning to her, while

he put the little steps for her to get in. She arrived, rather breathless, just in time.

With beating heart and pleasurable curiosity, she made her way to the drawing-room, where they all generally sat, and there through the doorway she could see the stranger in amicable conversation with her father and Mr. Bronson.

She crept quietly in and sat down on the low sofa in the background, but in a moment they grew conscious of her presence, and Sir Edward called her. "Come, Nadine, I want to introduce Mr. Delaval to you. My daughter—Mr. Delaval." Nadine shyly shook hands with him and they sat down.

"Mr. Delaval knows all about gold and silver and other nice things, Miss Nadine," Mr. Bronson said. "When we get to Gold Stamp he is going to take us down the mine."

Some paper that Mr. Delaval had given them seemed of great interest to the two elderly gentlemen while they studied it at the other end of the saloon, and so for a few moments Nadine was left in peace to talk to the young man. His grey eyes were the first ones she had ever realized were looking at her with interest, and a second perfectly delicious thrill came over her. She was too shy to begin the conversation, but he plunged in:

"I hope you will be interested in this rough country that we are going to, Miss Pelham."

Now she looked up at him. "Indeed, yes; I know that I shall. Do you live there—I mean, is it your home?"

He smiled quietly. "No; my home is down in the



South. I am just up here because I am interested in mines."

"Tell me about them."

Her blue eyes, set rather up at the corners, looked like stars at night to Bayard Delaval, peering out of the thickest possible black lashes. Her fine ivory-olive skin seemed smooth as a tea-rose petal, with the faint scarlet flush growing in her cheeks. Could lips be as red as that he wondered, without a scrap of paint? Yes, the whole thing was real. An instantaneous fascination fell upon him. She was so unutterably different to any of the girls that he knew—all the loveliest débutantes in Washington and New York, all the rough free-and-easy pals of the mining camps. There was no calculation in this face, nothing "cute," just a beautiful, human, passionate creature who evidently felt an interest in him, as he did in her.

Women had not mattered very much to Bayard Delaval. They had been delightful to pass the times of his rare leisure with; they were merely the decorations of life, not the real objective. To do, to achieve, was his aim. To wrest from nature a great fortune, which should give him power, and complete freedom, and presently a voice in his country's government. He had not had the luck to get over to France during the war; he had been kept grinding at immense works for armament, where his special knowledge had been indispensable. That had been a bitter disappointment; he had longed to fight. Now, at thirty-three, life was opening for him in a vast way.

He had a fourth interest in the Gold Stamp Corporation, and was practically king out there at the mine.

A quiet, reserved, strong character, whom it was



wiser not to quarrel with, and more advantageous to obey.

Responsibility and self-reliance create personality; there was nothing bashful or self-conscious about Bayard Delaval. He took a comprehensive look at Nadine. Did she really want to hear about the mine, or was it just to make conversation? He was not sure, so he began:

“It is all so very rough and different from anything that I expect you have been accustomed to. We shall get to a part of the country presently where there is not a blade of grass, not a living tree or flower; just sage brush worse than the desert you have come through, and the air is scorching and thick with dust, where men delve into the earth every day in search of gold.”

“It sounds awful,” whispered Nadine. “I do not care a bit about money.”

“No, I suppose not,” and a merry twinkle came into his keen eyes as he looked at her very perfect frock. He knew that kind of exquisite simplicity was the most expensive of all; he had often had to pay for it, on his trips to New York, when he went back into the civilization of his old world again! He looked at her perfect silk stockings and shoes and at the string of big pearls round her little throat. Sir Edward thought pearls quite suitable to a girl, and had given her three on every birthday, which now made a perfect necklace.

“No, I suppose money has no significance for you,” Bayard Delaval said again, and he laughed.

Nadine never liked people laughing at her. She pouted a little.

“I mean, of course, one has to have things.”

“Yes, one has to have things, and the worst of it

is that only such a few of them that one wants are unaffected and uninfluenced by gold."

"I want freedom—that has nothing to do with gold!"

"I want freedom too, but it, of all things, is concerned with gold."

"How?"

"Freedom implies liberty to do what you like, and go where you like. Well, you can't stir more than a few miles without gold, and you can't make anyone help you without gold. If either of us were to be dropped off this train now, having been told we had perfect liberty, what would become of us without gold? We'd be dead of starvation and thirst in a day or so; but with gold we could bribe that Indian you see over there to help us back into some civilization, where we could board a train again."

Nadine frowned. "It is civilization I believe I hate. I think those Indians look delicious."

He smiled again. "I don't believe you would like their dirty huts, nor, being a woman, having to do all the hard work."

"I see you are going to make me say that I don't really want freedom," and Nadine smiled now. "Well, tell me what your idea of freedom is."

"Freedom is when the spirit's desires are unhampered by material obstacles."

"Oh, that must be wonderful!" and she sighed.

"But the possession of sufficient gold is necessary to remove obstacles."

"For instance?"

"A man who has to work all day in a mine cannot

be said to be free to indulge his spirit's desires; he probably longs to be out in the air, or enjoying some sport, or giving pleasure to the girl he loves, or——”

“ Yes, I see.”

“ He goes on working and working to earn enough gold to make him free.”

“ How can a woman be free? ”

“ Women can never be free.”

“ You—an American—to say that! Why, Miss Bronson, who is with us on this trip, says all American women are perfectly free, and the men are slaves to them! ”

He laughed again, showing very white teeth.

“ You are arguing upon the basis of seeming, and not reality. The question is, have they got what their spirits want, or have they only material freedom, and are there some obstacles which they cannot overcome, either with gold or with cunning? For no matter what the obstacle may be, the knowledge that it is there precludes freedom.”

Nadine thought of Sadie's words. How she longed for forbidden fruit! Not even Sadie—rich, highly-indulged Sadie—was as yet without the attainment of her heart's desire—she had not complete freedom!

“ Then women cannot come so near to freedom as men? ”

“ No, they have to depend upon men for nearly everything that they really want ”; and he looked straight into Nadine's eyes, so that she suddenly looked down, and her heart beat a little faster.

No one had ever talked to her like this before. The guests of their own station in life who came to Pelham



Court treated her always as a child. Eustace, as some one of so little interest that conversation with her was too fatiguing to continue for long. She had never met any young men, other than the parson's son and one or two youths of the neighbourhood, who were sometimes asked to play tennis, but never left to talk to her! She found herself interested as she had never been in her life.

It was true what he was saying, of course, this man with the deep voice and an intonation that she was unaccustomed to. She did not know it was southern, she only knew it was not like Mr. Bronson's, or Sadie's, whose tones were as sharp as a peacock's.

She had a sudden feeling that she would like him to show mastery; she had no sense of rebellion, which was always uppermost when with her father.

Bayard Delaval had been analysing her. Here was a nature as yet unawakened; but what a well of passion lay deep there in her eyes! He found himself greatly moved. How dull and grey and commonplace his life had been of late! He bent a little nearer to her.

“This evening after dinner I want to show you what the desert means in the starlight, will you come out on the observation platform?”

But before Nadine could answer, Miss Blenkinsop came upon them from her compartment, her knitting in her hands!

## CHAPTER VII

**B**LENKIE at once sensed a danger. If Sir Edward wanted his daughter to marry her cousin, it was obviously her duty, as duenna, not to allow any attractive interlopers to intervene! So she sat down in the most upright chair that she could see.

Mr. Delaval took her measure. "It would be pretty hard to put anything over on her!" he decided. This would render his acquaintance with Miss Pelham all the more exciting! He made the conversation general, and gave Miss Blenkinsop some interesting information regarding the country and the Indians. Nadine raged silently. She was too well trained to show her annoyance though.

Luncheon made a diversion. Eustace and Sadie had been quietly sitting on the observation platform, for once left to complete peace! Miss Bronson knew men very well, and what were their weak points. She had played with them since she was thirteen. Self-complacent vanity, she had discovered, was Eustace's chief one. So she soothed him and flattered him and made him feel that she thoroughly understood him. She looked as innocent as a dove at luncheon, feeling quite confident that the end of the trip would see him completely her slave.

"How are you going to amuse us at Gold Stamp, Mr. Delaval?" she asked in a sprightly way. "We ought to be rewarded for coming into the desert like this."

“The aborigines will feel awfully honoured, I know, to meet you, Miss Bronson. We must take you round to see the gaming tables and the dance halls in the evening, and in the daytime we will go down into the mine.”

“That sounds all right. What do you say, Nadine?”

“I have never been down a mine. Do you have a lift?”

“A primitive sort of one. We go down six hundred feet.” Whatever happened up above ground, he could certainly circumvent Miss Blenkinsop when in those circuitous passages, he reflected; but they were a night and two days away from Gold Stamp yet!

“I am told things are not nearly so wild in the mining camps as they used to be,” Sir Edward said.

“I suppose there is a decent hotel?”

“Everything up to date in Gold Stamp, but when you get out to the mine it is pretty sketchy. You will probably only stay there a night or two, though; sometimes there are some rather rough customers about.”

Nadine felt excited, she could not have told why; she was conscious of Mr. Delaval's presence. She listened to every word he said, even when he was not addressing her. He was so different to Eustace or any of the boys who came to play tennis! How would they be able to arrange their afternoon? She would pretend that she was going to have the usual siesta, and indeed she would lie down for a few moments, to allay Blenkie's watchfulness, then she would get up and creep quietly through the two saloons to the observation platform, and even if Mr. Delaval was engaged with her father and Mr. Bronson, he would see her as she passed and possibly make some excuse to get away from them



and join her. Blenkie saw her safely to her berth and felt reassured. She had heard Sir Edward say at luncheon that they would examine reports afterwards. Sadie had apparently gone to her compartment. It seemed that the watchdog would be allowed to rest!

Nadine got Augustine to come as soon as she knew that Blenkie was safely off, and she changed her frock to a more becoming one; then she took a book and walked through the saloon. She was a little piqued because not one of the three men seemed to notice her passage; she did not stop to exchange a word with Sadie and Eustace, who appeared to be innocently playing dominoes in the drawing-room.

It was awfully hot out there on the observation platform. The sun, which had begun to sink a little, seemed to be blazing in. She was glad that she had brought an umbrella.

She settled herself and tried to read, and once or twice she nearly fell off to sleep. It was getting late, tea would come, and Blenkie!—and there would not be another chance probably! A feeling of disappointment arose in her, and then a resentment. Why were things so contrary? And just as she thought she must go and see what was happening, the door opened and Mr. Delaval came out. He stretched himself in the basket chair beside her.

“I knew that you were still here, of course,” he said. “I have never before found it hard to keep my attention on my work.”

“And you found it difficult now? It certainly is hot.”

“I wanted to be out here—in the air.”

His eyes were smiling at her. Then they both laughed.

“I came to your home once, about six weeks ago, you know, when I was over on the other side. I did not know then that there was a you, or I believe I'd have lost the steamer and accepted your father's invitation to stay over the week-end!”

“Papa asked you, and you did not stay. Oh, if you only had——!”

Then the scarlet flush came into her cheeks—she realized that she had said something indiscreet.

“Would it have made some difference, then—if I had stayed?” He was certainly surprised.

“It might have—Eu—we had a party arriving that afternoon, and some of them were such dull people; it might all have been more—fun—if you had stayed.”

He knew this was not the real reason, and that if he were to probe what it really was it would embarrass her. He was very tempted to do so, but let it pass for the moment.

“You have a gorgeous home, Miss Pelham,” he said instead. “I guess I did not even come in by the big entrance; I left the taxi man I had taken from the station to drive me the way he knew; but even that side of the house is pretty fine, and I made the acquaintance of two wonderful old dogs.”

“My beloved Sandie and Jean. Yes—I know——”  
“—You know?”

“Yes; I saw you out of the window—the windows of my room look on to that side-door. It is the way every one comes if they arrive from the West Lodge.”

Mr. Delaval leaned over nearer to her.

“ I remember I did look up, and I thought I saw some one looking from behind a curtain for a second as though they were expecting some one.”

Nadine clasped her hands suddenly; the loose suède gloves she wore concealed how small they were; she felt her engagement ring. She was glad that it was hidden. How she hated to think that she was bound to Eustace!

Bayard Delaval was wondering. There was evidently some memory connected with this visit of his to Pelham Court—what could it be?

Nadine did not want him to ask her, so she began to talk quickly.

“ What did you think of Pelham? It is supposed to be rather a nice old place.”

“ I should say—it’s about three hundred years old, isn’t it? ”

“ Some of it was built in 1591, and the rest later, We’ve always lived there.”

“ It must be a wonderful thing to own a place like that, to remember when you are walking around that the trees have been yours since they sprung from the earth, and that every bit of it is full of memories. Your father must be a very proud man.”

“ He is. But oh, Mr. Delaval, you can’t think what it is to live under all these memories. They crush you. I never feel that I belong to them. I am quite different—my mother was a Russian, you know.”

“ Ah! I was wondering what it was—you don’t look English. What a strange force heredity is. Then the things your father values don’t mean much to you, do they? ”



“Not a great deal,” and she looked out into the vanishing track. “I want to live, and not be suffocated by tradition. I want to expand and form my own opinions.”

Bayard Delaval leaned forward again and looked long at her. What a very pleasant task it would be to assist such a girl to emancipation!

“Do they keep you awfully tied up?”

“Oh, I ought not to grumble. Papa is very kind and so is every one; but it is the same thing every day and always. One must do certain things because the Pelhams have always done them. Or one must not do certain things, because the Pelhams have never done them. The Pelham name, the Pelham name! Sometimes I’d rather be called Smith!”

“I don’t know”—he lay back in his chair again, and grew reflective:—“to have a name means a standard to live up to. Over here we value those things quite a good deal, those of us who have them; but they don’t amount to a red cent unless character goes with them.”

“Do you know, I believe my father would die, willingly, rather than that any disgrace should fall upon the family. I think that honour matters to him more than affection, or ambition, or anything. It is a freezing atmosphere to live in.”

“He’s a great old specimen, isn’t he!”

Nadine clasped her hands round her knees and then went into one of her peals of laughter.

“Oh, it is lovely to hear papa being called ‘a great old specimen!’ Oh, I wish he could have heard you, it would do him good.”

Mr. Delaval laughed too.

“It was inappropriate; we have a lot of strange terms out here. When I left Harvard, I never used any of them, though, but perhaps I was an awful prig; and when I hear your voice, so soft, and the pronunciation so clear, I begin to appreciate good English again. Look over there, did you ever see anything more lonely than that solitary figure riding along on that old horse?”

Nadine turned in her chair and looked at the desert road, which was nothing but a track beaten in the sand; it ran along the route for miles and miles.

“Oh, poor man! Is he lost?—where can he be going?”

“No, he is not lost; he’ll be pretty hungry and tired though, I expect, when he gets to the next Indian village.”

Then he told her, in answer to her eager questions, of how rough the life was here out in the wilds, and of the lawlessness which used to abound, and of how great companies of miners had to be handled.

“They have to believe in you, or you can’t lead them. Your word’s got to be worth something, and your gun’s got to be ready.”

Nadine looked at him, and a thrill ran through her; he was so strong and lithe, and his mouth was so firm. She *felt* that he knew how to command and was afraid of nothing on earth. Ah, if only they had lived in the olden days, he would indeed have been a knight . . .

He turned back from gazing at the forbidding country and looked at her again. The attraction was growing stronger and stronger. He got her to talk, to tell him about her life, and what were her tastes and desires. And all the time Nadine had the uncomfortable feeling that she ought to tell him about Eustace—

if he did not know. But perhaps he did know. Then she stifled her conscience and told herself that there was no necessity to be gratuitous—and she was so enjoying herself—and——

“Tea is ready,” said Eustace, putting his head through the door. “Aren’t you people going to have any?”

“The English cannot live without their tea, Nadine said. “So of course I must go in,” and very reluctantly she rose.

“This track seems to me like life,” she said, as she leaned over the rail and watched the objects at each side gradually diminishing until they melted into the blue distance: “things seem frightfully large and important while they are near, and in no time they have just got so small they don’t matter a bit.”

“Everything depends upon the point of view, and sometimes our passions magnify things when they are close to us out of all proportion, and it is only when we see them in perspective that we can realize how foolish we have been.”

“Miss Blenkinsop says that no one ought to indulge in passion, it distorts everything.”

“There are passions—and passions,” he said, and there was a look in his eyes which made Nadine say quickly:

“Let’s go to tea.”



## CHAPTER VIII

**M**ISS BLENKENSOP wondered why Nadine never took off her gloves at tea. She ate nothing, to be sure, so it was not necessary, and Blenkie herself had always encouraged the wearing of gloves. Ladies should have white, well-cared-for hands, she had always insisted, and had trained Nadine in these ideas since she first came; but she thought one could draw the line at tea!

Nadine was saying to herself: "If he did see the ring at luncheon, then it can't be helped; but if he did not, then he shan't, until the last minute possible." So she went without some wonderful hot cakes the darkie cook had made expressly, and kept her loosely-gloved little bits of hands in her lap.

Nadine was very small for an English girl, not over five feet two inches high, and her feet and hands were the tiniest possible.

Mr. Delaval had not admired the English giantesses during his visit. His attitude towards women was protective—he preferred the size that he could pick up in his arms.

Miss Bronson was most sprightly at tea; her sophisticated comprehension had taken in that Nadine was interested in the young engineer, and she did not intend that there should be any pauses in the conversation or any chance that this interest should show. It would suit her plans very well if, presently, Nadine's conduct could be used as a lever to separate her from Eustace;

but at the present moment, to arouse his jealousy, or rather his wounded vanity, might re-awaken his interest in his fiancée. So, for her own ends, Sadie played into the hands of fate, and aided the pair to circumvent Blenkie again.

The four went out on to the observation platform, and then they divided two and two at the far sides, the noise of the train quite preventing either couple from overhearing the other's conversation.

"Do you like dancing, Miss Pelham?" Mr. Delaval asked. "We do such a lot of it here."

"I adore it, but I have hardly ever danced with anyone. I am not what is called 'out' in England, that is, I have not been presented at Court, or been to a real ball yet. I danced with a young man for the first time in New York."

She made this ingenuous confession very sweetly, he thought, and how refreshing it was to hear! He had grown very sick of the much-fingered peaches he met in the cities. It was abominably hard on girls that nature had arranged that they could not indulge in things, like men, without cheapening themselves; but everything for women was unjust, more or less, and a girl who had not been mauled about by dozens of fellows was delightful to meet.

He had a sudden feeling of desire for conquest. He would love to know that *he* was the first man who should ever hold her in his arms.

"We will dance at Gold Stamp," he said eagerly.

"Eustace—my cousin—does not think I know how. He is precise, like all the rest of the family, and steps in measured time, dum, dum, dum. It says absolutely

nothing to me—I want to forget all about everything but the rhythm.”

She half shut her eyes, voluptuously, and her nostrils quivered. She was entirely unconscious that she was presenting a sensuously attractive picture to any young man sitting next to her; she was not thinking of herself, or what effect she was producing. Something in her nature was awakening, that was all.

Bayard Delaval thrilled. He knew now that he was falling in love with her. And what would this lead to? Sir Edward Pelham would never consider him as a son-in-law, even though he was quite rich enough now to make a very presentable settlement, and he would be very rich indeed in the near future. But one of another nation—no, he knew that the very idea would appear to Sir Edward as impossible. This, however, was no great obstacle—a girl had a right to please herself, and if he should be able to make her love him, no father should stand in the way.

Like Blenkie's opposition, her parent's antagonism would make Nadine more precious.

All this had flashed through his head in the few seconds while he was looking at her red, full mouth, as she spoke of dancing. He intended to enjoy every moment, whether or no nothing further ever came of it.

They talked of travel after this—neither had seen the continent of Europe—and both longed to explore Italy and Spain.

“I can't think of anything more divine,” Nadine said, “than to go to Italy with plenty of time, and a nice motor”—then, as she saw the look of awakening emotion in his face, she went on hurriedly—“and, and—a nice party of people who liked it too.”



“ I don't think I should want a party ; I would like to go just with one person—whom I loved.” His voice very deep, had many insinuating tones in it. Nadine's imagination took fire at once. That was the sort of trip she too would wish for.

“ Tell me where you would go first ! ” she said a little breathlessly. “ In—Italy, I mean.”

“ Well, supposing we made Genoa our head-quarters, landing there from here ; then I'd like to poke about there for a bit, and see where that old Navy came from that was so great in its day ; then I suppose one would go north to Milan—and Florence ; Florence must be wonderful—a city of merchant princes—like us Americans. I would like to study the Italian Renaissance on the spot, wouldn't you ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” whispered Nadine, whose thoughts had centred not so much on the pleasure of studying history but on the intoxicating joy of having a charming lover in ideal surroundings ! Her eyes were shining. “ I suppose there are some people in the world who can realize their dreams and go on trips like that.”

“ ‘ Never the time, and the place, and the loved one, all together,’ ” he quoted lightly ; “ but I don't believe in the word ‘ *never*. ’ I believe if you want a thing, and it is the right thing for you, that just to determine to go out and get it, and not let the grass grow under your feet, always gets you there in the end. Perhaps, some day, Miss Pelham, both you and I will realize our dreams.”

He was looking at her so intently now that she dared not look up. She had a feeling that something was

tempting her to move very close to him. She had no idea of the force of propinquity, she had never heard the modern jargon of currents and influences discussed, nor anything about "reactions." She did not analyse her instincts, nor his instincts: nature guided Nadine's subconscious mind; but fortunately for herself her conscious one had been disciplined for all her life into expressing the conventions. Bayard Delaval, who studied all these things, understood this about her, and with a thrill he asked himself what would she be if freed from inhibitions? He remembered a mountain lion cub that he had caught very young and tamed once, so that it was apparently the quietest, most obedient dog, until it gorged itself on raw meat one day——.

There was one thing quite certain, he must be very careful to take no advantage of her.

"Well, and after Florence, where then?" she asked with a little pout. She had been wondering why he was silent; he was not becoming like Eustace, she hoped, uninterested in anything she said.

"Well, we'd go to Pisa, and see the leaning tower." Something quivered in her when he said "We'd," did he mean, he and she?

"And we would get down to Rome, and the south, and I guess we'd be feeling pretty pagan by then, and have a look at Greece."

"I can't imagine anything more delightful," exclaimed Nadine. "If—if—the party was sympathetic, and wanted the same things. My governess, and papa and I always want each something different. It would not be any fun to go with them."

“Let’s pretend we are going together—just you and me.”

The scarlet pink flush came into her cheeks—she felt that she must chaff now, she was feeling so deeply.

“I’m horrid to travel with—so capricious. You would not like it a bit.”

“I should not let you be capricious. A woman is not capricious if she is handled the right way.”

“You know a great deal about women, Mr. Delaval?”

“A pretty considerable amount—they are predatory animals, as a rule, cunning as foxes, brave as lions, slippery as eels.”

“What do they want?”

“A master, and——”

“Pouff!” Nadine interrupted, tossing her head in mock indignation.

“You did not let me finish—I’d got as far as ‘and’——”

“Well—and what?”

“Lots of love.”

Nadine looked down suddenly and clasped her hands—she felt her engagement ring. Yes, this was true—lots of love. This American man had put her unconscious longings into words. This is what she wanted of life—this great wonderful thing which mattered far more than anything else in the world.

When she looked up again her blue eyes were a little fierce, and her white teeth showed biting together.

“Some people do not seem to be allowed any of that—they are just made to have duty all the time. I have often wondered—what is love?”



“It is the best thing in life. Half the folks who talk about it don’t really know what it means; they fritter it all away on silly little sensations. We ought never to be satisfied until we have found some one who makes up the whole show for us, and then we should give the best and the greatest of our being. But love for me means fidelity. I’m like your Marquis of Montrose in the song: A woman would have to be utterly mine in word and thought and look. I’d never stand any other fellow hanging around. If I gave her the whole of my heart, I’d want the whole of hers.”

Nadine felt that a great breath of desert air was rushing round her, and almost sweeping her off her feet.

Passion blazed in her eyes as they turned towards the young man, but she caught sight of Eustace beyond him, reclining with his usual indifferent lassitude, his over-bred feet in their immaculate silk socks and perfectly-cleaned brown shoes propped up against the balcony rail in front of him. Sadie was doing all the talking. This was her fate—a boneless, flabby, over-civilized partner for life! whom in the end she should rule and break into bits; and beside her was—a master——.

Bayard Delaval knew that they were on very dangerous ground, and that he must not let them go too far at present; he had an insane longing to take her in his arms and teach her all about love. But his will was a strong one. So he held back the burning words and instead pointed to two Indian horsemen, who were riding against the sky line.

“Tradition makes those two act in certain ways, just as strongly as it probably does you and your cousin

in another way. The Indians are stamped with character. So are you English—of a certain class. We Americans look like a determined sort of people, but we are not stamped with anything in particular, because we have no traditions, and each man has got to believe only in himself.”

“But surely that is the best thing to believe in.” Nadine felt she was on earth again, something very strong had been exalting her.

“It is all right to believe in yourself if you have made the self something that you respect, so that you’d never want to put anything over on it that was not fine. But if you don’t really amount to anything, it doesn’t hold any, and then, things go better when there is tradition.”

“I hate tradition—I hate ties—I want to be free.”

“There you are again, Miss Pelham; but it is not really freedom you are desiring, it is understanding.”

The sun was beginning to sink in the west, the line had taken a curve for the last mile, and they seemed to be facing the great orange ball of fire. Nadine looked over the sage brush to the endless desert, and sighed.

“I wonder why the evening is so much more beautiful than the day, and yet always a little sad? The desert is hideous at noontime, and now it looks all mysterious and enticing.”

“Illusion. The desert is the same, only the low sun makes the shadows and the colours beautiful, and that is why it is sad; we know it is only illusion, really.”

Nadine rose: “Let us come away out of illusion into the reality of dressing for dinner,” she said, and she sighed again.

He got up with her, and held the door open for her to pass into the drawing-room beyond, and as he did so a lurch of the car threw her a little against him, so that he caught the scent of her hair.

“It is a good thing, it isn't dark!” he said to himself, as he turned and sat down again.

When Nadine reached her compartment, she sank into the little chair. She felt that she must not let herself think. She *would* not think. She was going to put on an especially becoming frock, and she was going to enjoy her evening just as much as the gods would let her, come what might.

“How did you get on with your bridge, dear?” Miss Blenkinsop asked, as she came in on her way into the saloon. “You must be tired, playing all the afternoon. Sadie, whom I met just now, said you all had had a wonderful game, and had not even finished your rubber when you had to leave off to dress.”

Nadine bent her head; she was no good at deception, even when it was extremely humorous, as at present.

“I don't believe I shall ever be a good player, Blenkie. I don't think I keep my head enough.”

“I have always told you, Nadine, that it is a mark of disciplined good breeding to keep your head, as much in affairs of card playing as in the affairs of life. It is good for you to play either bridge or chess, dear, they help as a lesson.”

Then Blenkie went on: she believed in a sermon in season, and the season was so seldom propitious with Nadine!

“The reason that they had to call up the dear Guards



Regiments for the most difficult tasks in the war, Nadine, was because their perfect discipline would stand any test. I am so pleased, dear, that you had so useful an afternoon."

"So am I, Blenkie—I learned a lot." Nadine was now almost at laughing point. Miss Blenkinsop was just leaving, when she turned back and said:

"Try not to use slang and bad grammar, Nadine. Having to mix with so many people here, hardly of your station in life, is very apt to affect the phrasing; and I am sure Eustace and your dear father would find incorrect language very distressing to their ears."

"I am *sure* they would!" and as the worthy Blenkie closed the door, I regret to have to write, Miss Pelham thrust her tongue out and made a grimace at her governess like a street urchin, without even remarking whether or no Augustine's back was turned.

"Oh, what do I care about phrasing, or grammar, or anything," she said to herself. "He's a *Man*."

## CHAPTER IX

AS Nadine went down the passage to the saloon for dinner, she kept twisting her engagement ring; then she left it with the stone inside—the little platinum circle might not catch the eye as much as a big diamond, was her half-conscious thought. She placed herself opposite Mr. Delaval too, a little obliquely, when they sat down to the table, so that the flowers might hide her hands. She was demure all through the repast—rather silent, unless she talked nicely to Mr. Bronson, on her right—and Miss Blenkinsop decided that she had never seen her pupil behaving in so really distinguished a manner, so that after all this American trip was not injuring her.

Bayard Delaval was no young college lad, accustomed to give way to all his feelings. He showed no special interest in Miss Pelham now; indeed he had some lively sallies for Sadie Bronson, who was always full of back talk. So that the dinner passed without any of the powers having had their suspicions aroused.

Would Mr. Delaval really be able to manœuvre that they two could again go and sit on the observation platform? This was all Nadine was thinking about. Mr. Delaval apparently had some important plans of the mine to look up in his compartment, and asked to be excused the moment dinner was over. The two elderly gentlemen and Sadie and Eustace settled down to bridge and Blenkie to her knitting.

Nadine's heart sank into her tiny slippers. He

might at least have *tried* to see and talk to her! She went into her compartment and fetched *The Story of Bayard*—her fetish; and she sat down in the rear saloon, whose door opened on to the platform. She had not been there very long, however, when Mr. Delaval came back with some papers; but seeing the bridge party made up, he could not, of course, disturb them. So in the most casual way he strolled past Blenkie and on into the farther saloon, and there, as though merely for politeness' sake he took a chair next Nadine.

His keen grey eyes were whimsical.

“If you are in the middle of a wood, and want to get to a place at the right end of it, you've sometimes got to go out at the left, and round; do you know that, Miss Pelham?”

Nadine laughed.

“Especially when there are dragons and foxes and sheep in the wood.”

He glanced at Blenkie's uncompromising back, which could be seen through the doors.

“She never leaves you, I suppose?”

“Never. Can't you understand why I am always talking about freedom?”

“Yes—What is that book you are reading?”

“It is the one that I love best in the world. It is the story of Bayard——my knight.”

He leaned forward eagerly. Could she have said that on purpose? but no; she probably did not know his name—he would tell her.

“My name is Bayard,” he said. Nadine was thoroughly startled—that mystic side of her nature,



inherited from her gipsy mother, concerned itself a great deal with omens and coincidences.

“Your name—is—Bayard? How extraordinary!” She gasped a little between the words, while the colour came into her cheeks. “If you only knew how awfully strange that is!”

He was exceedingly interested.

“Do tell me why? It is not a very unusual name in America; there were two other Bayards at Harvard with me.”

Nadine was staring at him, while she unconsciously clasped the book to her breast, forgetting about showing the ring.

Surely there was fate in this. She had called him Bayard—her knight, come to set her free, when she had seen him out of the window; and his real name was Bayard!—Did coming events cast their shadows before?

The confusion which she was in showed in her face.

Mr. Delaval was greatly intrigued. There was something about his going to Pelham that day, and his name, which evidently had power to cause this lovely girl great emotion. He would endeavour to find out what it could be.

“Please tell me why it is so odd that my name should be Bayard?” he asked, bending over nearer to her. His action caught the attention of Blenkie, who was keeping her eye upon them from the other saloon.

An interested conversation with anyone but her fiancé should not be countenanced in her pupil, this good governess felt, and began picking up a stitch in

her knitting preparatory to joining them. Bayard Delaval realized there was no time to be lost.

“Won’t you tell me?” he pleaded. Then, before Nadine could answer, he saw the ring on her left third finger, and his face hardened, and a question grew in his eyes, which were fixed on her little hand clasping the book.

She realized what had happened with a strange pang at her heart, and quickly dropped the book with both hands in her lap, while she lowered her head so that he could not see her eyes.

“You are engaged to some one, Miss Pelham?” His voice sounded a little hoarse even to himself.

“To—my cousin—Eustace.” Nadine’s whisper was almost inaudible.

He began to speak, but Miss Blenkinsop was upon them with some appropriate remark about the weather. So Bayard Delaval crushed back all the wild things which he might have said, and got up, ceding his place, which Blenkie immediately filled.

“I think there is going to be a thunderstorm,” and he glanced out of the window; then he strolled back to the others at the bridge table. For once Nadine gave way to her feelings. She could have killed Blenkie!

“Can’t you ever leave me alone?” she cried angrily, and bounding up with her precious book, she went out into the night, slamming the platform door after her.

Miss Blenkinsop was too dumbfounded and horrified to express herself, and dropped two stitches in her knitting!

When the cool air blew upon Nadine’s face, she put up her hand and loosened her hair in the front, letting

the wind blow through it. It seemed as though it would help her to think.

All pleasure was over; he knew now that she was tied and bound to Eustace, and he would not show interest in her any more most probably. How hateful everything was!

The overmastering influence of her father still held her so strongly that she never once thought of open rebellion. She could storm and rage, but the idea of breaking chains never occurred to her. She was just a poor miserable animal in a cage banging itself against iron bars.

And by the bridge table Bayard Delaval was cursing fate. Why had he not noticed the ring before? He did not suppose that she had deliberately hidden it from him, as indeed why should she? They had only met that morning for the first time, he could not yet matter to her enough for her to have wished to deceive him. No, it was just his own stupidity. Engaged to Eustace Pelham!—How had such a chap been able to get by with it? A family arrangement of course. In that old fool place, Europe, they could still put over stunts like that, he supposed. Of course the girl could not care for such a fellow—and he looked down at Eustace's delicate hands holding the cards. But at least, until he knew that the engagement was against her wish, it would not be the straight thing to do to make up to her. He would stick to friendship, and grow to know her mind. But since she was brimful of passion, and life, and was quite unaware of it, or that there was danger ahead, it would be wiser not to court temptation



by going out on the observation platform to look at the stars, as had been his intention.

Sadie Bronson, however, disposed of matters in her own way. She was "out" for the moment, and leaned back in her chair.

"Oh, isn't it hot, Mr. Delaval," she said. "Let's go and get a breath of air," and she rose and went to the platform door, and the young man was obliged to follow her. They found Nadine leaning over the rail gazing at the stars—a heavy black cloud seemed to make those below it more bright.

"I wonder what they mean?" she said, pointing to the sky—"if they are really worlds, or only angels' eyes watching us?"

"How tired they must get night after night for thousands of years, seeing the same old games; but I never did think angels had much of a fine time anyway," Miss Bronson remarked. "It is the devils who get all the candies." Then, after a few more pertinent sentences, she turned back to the door again.

"You'd better give Miss Pelham a lesson in astronomy, Mr. Delaval: 'Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky!' I'm for spades and clubs in the saloon."

"And how about hearts, Miss Bronson? What will you do with them?" and he held the door for her.

"I'll leave them for you to play with on the observation platform, Mr. Delaval!" and with a saucy backward glance she went from them.

Nadine was very nervous. She felt that she must talk at once so as to avoid anything serious. She was so inexperienced, she had no idea of leading a conver-

sation in the way she would have wished, so she blurted out.

“Isn't Sadie a delightful person, so full of fun. I wish I were an American girl——”

“I don't; you are much more interesting as you are—there is so much to discover in you.”

“I don't think that I know myself.”

“I am sure you do not. You may give yourself a great surprise some day.”

“I suppose it is wrong of me to have such instincts, but I so often get wild feelings that I must just run away and live like a gipsy; and do you know, there are some kinds of music which drive me crazy.”

“You are half Russian, didn't you say?” He was thinking she looked like a gipsy there under the stars, with the yellow light falling upon her dimly from the saloon windows behind. Her olive-ivory skin, and very black hair, ruffled and curly now, where she had loosened it, appeared so extremely un-English.

“Yes; my mother was a Russian princess—I do not know from what part. I suppose papa loved her very much, because he never speaks of her; she died when I was only a year old.” No one had ever told Nadine that her mother was a gipsy. “I put flowers on her tomb every Saturday when we are at home; but I don't think it means anything much, putting flowers on people's bodies, when their spirits are far away, do you?”

“No. Don't you wonder where the spirits are while we look up at the sky at all the stars? everything seems so vast there, and we seem just atoms——”

“ I can't think what we are here for, with everything we want forbidden ”—she sighed impatiently.

“ What is forbidden you? ” he asked. But now Nadine pulled herself together; the half inherited from her father prompted her to remember it was not quite good taste to confide in one who was almost a stranger, so she laughed a little nervously and answered vaguely, that it was probably only her foolish fancies. Bayard Delaval was going through a strong temptation there, with the soft summer air around them, and the great desert stretching away right and left, while the track diminished as they left it behind them. No one who has not leaned over the platform rail of an observation car, at the end of a swiftly-moving train, can realize the weird sensation it gives. He was very close to Nadine too, and propinquity is a wonderful thing, especially in the half dark! But the character of the man asserted itself. He had decided he would stick to friendship. So he spoke now almost coldly—of the rough town they were going to, of the cheery character of the miners, and their quaint laws and observances. His whole manner had altered from what it had been during the day.

“ While a man is married he takes good care of his wife out there, ” he said at last; “ but you can get a divorce almost while you wait——! ”

Just as he said this, the door opened, and Sir Edward came out. He had looked up from his bridge when Miss Bronson returned, and suddenly became aware of both his daughter's and the young mining engineer's absence from the saloon beyond, while Miss Blenkinsop could be seen knitting agitatedly by the outer door.



The rubber had ended a moment or two after, and he rose while they were shuffling the cards, and came to her.

“Where is Nadine, Miss Blenkinsop?” he asked, a little sternly.

“She has remained upon the balcony with Mr. Delaval, Sir Edward. In spite of incurring her anger, I was just about to join them.”

Sir Edward frowned.

“Why should she be angry at your coming?”

“I regret to say Nadine quite lost her temper just now, and reproached me for never leaving her alone.” Blenkie’s knitting needles flashed fiercely, she moved them so rapidly.

Sir Edward lit a cigarette, then he opened the balcony door.

What he saw was two young backs leaning over the rail, and Mr. Delaval was pointing to the north as though explaining something. This seemed innocent enough, but Sir Edward knew the world and the nature of man, even if that of woman was a fearsome mystery to him. And summer nights under the stars, from time immemorial, had been blamed for kindling certain desires.

He had come out quite in time, he decided. Bayard Delaval turned to him without the least embarrassment.

“By to-morrow evening we shall be at Gold Stamp,” he announced. “It is there to the north-east.”

“Isn’t it all delightful?” Nadine said. She was far from feeling calm. She feared her father would be displeased with her, and that frightened her, and she

was chilled by the stiffness which had come into Mr. Delaval's tones.

Yes, all fun was over. He would not bother with her now he knew that she was engaged. And because he had become, not only forbidden fruit—which he had been from the beginning—but out of her reach as well, her interest in him had begun to grow proportionately. Every woman probably has felt at some time of her life just what Nadine was experiencing.

All the wild part<sup>m</sup> of her nature was seething, and all the part in fear of her father held it in check.

“It is quite time that you were in bed, child,” Sir Edward said. “It is after ten, and you have had a long day.”

Nadine knew that this was an order, so long habit made her obey and say good-night, but her father felt that the swish of her skirts as she passed him and the peck she gave his cheek, as she kissed him breathed resentment.

When she was gone, he talked long to his chief engineer; and being a just man, if filled with old-fashioned prejudices, he was obliged to admit to himself that he was a very intelligent and long-headed fellow. While in spite of his American slang, which was so apt as to be interesting, he was absolutely a gentleman!

“Delaval?” Sir Edward said to himself. “From decent stock, undoubtedly. I wonder if he knows from which branch he has come?”

Nadine had literally bounced past Miss Blenkinsop and had given Eustace a frigid good-night. He and Sadie and Mr. Bronson were showing each other card tricks. No parent's commands would have decided the

bed hour of Miss Bronson——! who intended to show Mr. Pelham the Great Bear, and the Pleiades herself, presently.

She kissed her hand lightly to Nadine, who murmured something about fatigue and disappeared.

Augustine was waiting for her mistress, but was quickly dismissed; and then when she was alone, Nadine threw herself down upon the sofa, and angry tears scorched her eyes.

His name was Bayard. Surely fate in some way *must* be going to make him her knight! But he did not seem at all interested now. He had talked of such a lot of technical things. Not of the stars, and he had not insisted that she should tell him why it was odd that his name should be what it was.

She felt that she hated Eustace. She hated Blenkie. She almost hated her father; but here her thoughts stopped in fear again. There would never be any getting away from papa.

Her senses seemed to be all on the alert. It almost seemed that, in spite of the noise of the train, she could hear the gramophone—Victrola, Sadie called it—and was she dreaming, or was it playing that Russian music—which she had heard on the ship?

She jumped up and opened her door a little. Yes, now she could hear more painly. She undid the few pins in her rather short curly hair, and shook it out. Then she began to dance, as if in spite of herself. The music was very indistinct, and presently she sank again into a low chair.

She rocked herself to and fro for a minute, fiercely. Here she was a prisoner—alone—and only through the



wooden wall was some one whom she wanted—near, very near her—and whom she might not have. Then suddenly she fell to sobbing, and so at last crept into her bed.

And out on the observation platform, Sadie Bronson, who knew all about the effects of propinquity, allowed the rocking of the train to shake her nearer and nearer to Eustace Pelham, until their shoulders were touching as they leant over the rail;—and when she knew that she had begun to awaken some kind of emotion in him, she too demurely said she was tired and would go in to bed.

“Now I guess I shan’t have to do much more chasing,” she said to herself complacently. “He’s on the trail. . . .”

## CHAPTER X

SIR EDWARD and Miss Blenkinsop prevented a moment's *tête-à-tête* between Mr. Delaval and Nadine until they arrived at bustling, busy Gold Stamp. And because it was a human agency, and not fate which had intervened, some stubborn quality in the young man came uppermost, and made him determine to make opportunities for himself in spite of his knowing it was better not to do so, and having already decided that he would keep to friendship! But he could not bear the idea of Sir Edward and that stern governess getting the better of him!

The Gold Stamp hotel was like all American hotels of mushroom growth, filled with every convenience, if devoid of beauty. But there was a ball room with a good floor and a stirring band, which played rhythmic syncopated music. The place was full of mine owners and business men and a certain amount of the miners themselves. Magnificent, stalwart creatures, with a careless insouciance which marks them out from any other vocation in America.

There were very few women to be seen.

Nadine noticed that everywhere Bayard Delaval was greeted with cordial respect.

She made herself look as lovely as possible in the simplest of her Paris frocks for dinner, and came down with Miss Blenkinsop, hoping that something would turn up. She had fretted like a horse on too tight a curb all the day in the train, knowing full well that

her father now had instructed Blenkie to circumvent any possible talks with the young American. But surely if Sadie suggested dancing after dinner they could not prevent her dancing with him!

Sadie did suggest dancing, and although Sir Edward in his heart disapproved of *his* daughter dancing in a mining hotel ball room, he was too courteous to cast a reflection upon his partner's child by forbidding his own from participating in the amusement. He merely said to Eustace:

"My dear boy, I think you had better look after Nadine."

Mr. Delaval, with great tact, had already asked Miss Bronson to dance, and the four started. Nadine had difficulty to control her temper. All joy had left her, her feet felt like lead, and Eustace said:

"You are dancing beautifully, Nadine; you see, dear child, it was only because you were not used to my step—your time is perfect now."

"I am sure it is," she snapped rather bitterly; that is just how life would be, with him; of course they would all think her perfect when she had not a scrap of spirit left!

She watched Sadie and Mr. Delaval with the corner of her eye. It was plain to be seen that *He* knew all about dancing! Oh! what would it be to whirl round in his arms like that; would this tiresome old fox-trot never end! . . .

It did finish at the usual time, and the two couples joined each other. Nadine had purposely stopped at the farther side of the room from where her father and Blenkie stood.



“Oh! Nadine, Mr. Delaval is too glorious to dance with—you just try!” Miss Bronson exclaimed ecstatically.

The pauses between the dances were extremely short, and as she spoke a valse struck up.

“I hate vales,” Eustace announced; “let us go and sit down, Miss Bronson.”

Sadie complied, and Nadine found herself floating away in Mr. Delaval’s arms!

If she had been exalted by the mere fact of dancing with the uninteresting young man in New York, she now felt almost intoxicated, her pleasure was so great. Every sensuous instinct in her half-gipsy nature was awakened—the music, the lights, the motion, and being so near to the man whom quite unconsciously she had now begun to love, seemed to transport her into some voluptuous paradise; and the power of her magnetism absolutely pervaded Bayard Delaval; wild fire seemed to enter his blood; he clasped her close to him, even if she belonged—or rather was going to belong—to some one else, this moment was theirs!

Fate seemed to be benign to them for that evening! Mr. Bronson was engaging Sir Edward in deep conversation with a number of the mining magnates, and his back was turned to them. Miss Blenkinsop also had been introduced to a Sheriff’s wife.

The perfect rhythm of the valse carried the pair on in a kind of exquisite dream. Their hearts were beating close together.

They never paused a second until the music stopped, and then both were a little pale. Bayard Delaval was accustomed to control all his emotions, and his speech;

so he said nothing ecstatic and held himself sternly in hand, but all these wonderful sensations were quite new to Nadine, and she could not successfully hide them; her eyes were misty and soft with passion, and her lips looked like ripe cherries.

He knew very well that if they had been alone at that moment nothing could have kept them from falling into each other's arms. . . . He must not dance with her again that night. He *must* act up to his standard of a square game. He knew quite well what she was feeling, and the temptation to tell her that he loved her was immense.

He tried to say something very ordinary, and asked if he might bring up one or two great friends of his who were in the hotel.

Nadine came to earth; she bowed, and he took her across to Miss Blenkinsop while he pretended to look for the young men.

He went outside into the night air, his temples felt as though they were bursting.

As he stood there, one of the very boys, Hickory Cannon, whom he intended to introduce, came up to him, and together they went back into the ball room, and the introduction was made, and as Nadine went off to dance with the new-comer, Bayard joined the group of the elderly gentlemen.

Nadine felt deeply aggrieved. He did not want to dance with her, then? Had she not danced well, or was it only because he knew she was engaged? Her utterly untrained emotions were causing her anguish almost. She knew nothing about love or how it came to people. She had only her own imagination to guide

her as to what it might be. She had no conscious thought that she was in love with Bayard Delaval, she only knew, dumbly, like an animal, that every fibre of her body desired to be near him, that she hated him to have gone off to her father, away from her, like that. The boy she was dancing with was an excellent partner too, and gradually the disturbed emotion subsided in the perfect exercise, and the Pelham half of Nadine could reassert its influence.

She must not be so foolish as she felt she certainly had been. Perhaps she had shown Mr. Delaval too plainly that she had found the valse divine!

But what was the boy she was now dancing with saying about Bayard and a wonderful story of shooting and coolness of head?

“No yellow dog likes to get within range of his gun—if it comes to a show down!” he said.

“Do you mean that you really shoot people here?” Nadine asked aghast. “I thought that was only in Bret Harte’s tales!”

“We did a little of that during the strikes last year—the boys’ blood was up, and there was an ugly gang around who had not played square with the Prince—that’s what we call old Bayard—but he settled ’em!”

“Oh! do tell me about it!” implored Nadine. And so they stopped dancing and went and sat down and Hickory Cannon began.

He told of how there was one particularly mean desperado who had led the others on in a false claim to another man’s ground; and how Bayard had righted the matter, and then in revenge the man had shot at him when he was returning from the mine unarmed,



and wounded him badly in the left arm; and how they had picked him up half dead from loss of blood; and then of how, when he was well again, a month or two after, and happened to be in one of the dance halls standing by the bar, the same man came in, and again Bayard happened to be unarmed because he had been dancing. The man came up to a few paces from him, and pointed his gun at him, and told him to hold up his hands. He fixed the brute with his eye, put his hand behind his back and pretended not to hear. The bartender understood the signal and pushed a gun into his hand. Then the man roared "he'd be revenged this time!" and as he fired, Bayard fired too, and shot him dead.

This was the substance of the boy's tale.

"Mr. Delaval—killed a man?" Nadine's voice was awed.

"Why certainly; that's why we respect him: he always stands for fair play, and isn't afraid to shoot to enforce it!"

Nadine thrilled—here was a master indeed! She suddenly thought of Eustace, and then she laughed. How Eustace would hate rowdy dance halls, and having to be ready to shoot on sight! She did not imagine that he would be a coward. No Pelhams were; but the familiarity and the rough and tumble would so disgust him!

He came up just then, his conscience rather guilty because his acquaintance with Miss Bronson had, he began to be afraid, developed into a kind of flirtation! Sadie had been extremely alluring during the valse they had sat out.

She had a look of frank innocence upon her sparkling face. She had instinctively understood that she must now be very careful in her handling of this Englishman! If once he became thoroughly aware that he was attracted to her, that grace of breeding in him would cause him to pull up from good taste. It must be so insidious, the spell she cast upon him, that he would be floundering before he was aware of it. A little jealousy might not come amiss! So she threw a glance at the young ore assayer, Hickory Cannon, which had a challenge in it he quite understood. Here was a girl of his own country, ready for a lark! and he would not have to mind what he was saying as he felt he perhaps would have to with the stranger. So he deserted Nadine gladly, and started off with Sadie leaving the fiancées alone. Sir Edward looked over to them now, they did not appear to be amusing themselves he thought. Would marriage make any difference? The question was a troublesome one to face.

Meanwhile Bayard Delaval was going through unwonted disturbance of mind. He had not felt this violent emotion towards a woman since he was a college lad. He was angry with himself that anything should have such power over him. He hated to know Nadine was now dancing with her fiancé. He hated to think anyone had the right to touch her! More of Montrose's song rang in his head:

“As Alexander I will reign,  
And I will reign alone;  
My thoughts did ever more disdain  
A rival on my throne.”

That is how he felt and had always felt about women. All or nothing—worship or indifference. And as far

as he could see in this case it must be indifference. He turned to the group of old gentlemen, and it chanced that Mr. Bronson drew him close to the dancers, so that when Eustace and Nadine stopped it was beside them. And when the music began again Mr. Bronson was talking to Eustace, who seemed absorbed in what he was saying. Nadine could not keep a look of invitation from her eyes. Bayard bent nearer to her, meaning to tell her that he had business to talk over with her father and must go, but she took it to mean that he would dance, so she placed her hand on his arm. He knew that she was too timid and sensitive for him to say baldly that this had not been his intention, as he would have done in a second to Sadie Bronson, so there was nothing for it but to go on.

The moment he held her close to him the same wild joy filled Nadine, and she turned her radiant face up to him in answer to some quite casual thing he had said, just as her father happened to join Mr. Bronson close to where they paused. It was a revelation to Sir Edward. It was Nada looking at him all over again, as she stretched herself towards him along the table among the broken glass—just the same voluptuous passionate abandon. Good God! What was to be done!

He could not say that the young man was presuming. There was no look of "come hither" in his face; indeed, his closely cut features appeared rather stern.

He could not stop his daughter in the middle of the dance, but she should go to bed the moment it was finished! And the next time they came round, Nadine caught her father's icy glance—and the old fear returned to her—so that she quickly made up her mind. She



would not wait for him to make some freezingly polite remark about the lateness of the hour, or some other excuse, but she would go up to him, and say she was tired, of her own accord.

Bayard Delaval felt the change in her, and he looked down and saw her full under-lip quiver.

“What is the matter?” he asked, perhaps a little too tenderly. “The life seems suddenly to have gone out of your feet!”

“It has,” she whispered. “I am tired. I think I will say good night now.”

They stopped close to her father, and Nadine put out her hand.

“Good night, Mr. Delaval,” she said politely. “Papa, where is Blenkie? I suppose we shall have to be up very early to-morrow to go to the mine, so we had better be seeking our little bye-byes now.”

Sir Edward was nonplussed—he did not expect this sensible decision on her part!—he unfroze, and stood talking to her and the young mining engineer until Eustace and Blenkie came up and joined them.

“Aren’t you tired, Blenkie?” Nadine said. “I am. Let’s go.”

And then they said good night all round. Sir Edward found himself very much disturbed as he talked to Bayard Delaval and Mr. Bronson later on. The young man was so sensible—so quiet, so resourceful. There was nothing in him to find fault with. The only thing he—Sir Edward—could possibly do was to keep a more careful watch upon his daughter. A sense almost of resentment came over him when he thought of Eustace. He was certainly not an ardent lover. He

would give him a hint on the morrow to quicken his paces a bit.

They were to start at eight in the morning in automobiles especially built to go over the rough, uneven ground, and get away about fifty miles off to the new camp of Gold Rock, where the Gold Stamp Mining Corporation owned the wonderful new mine. Here they would stay for the night in the one extremely primitive board-shanty hotel.

They calculated they would arrive there somewhere about ten; the going could not be break-neck because the road was a mere track among the sage brush up a mountain side.

At Gold Rock there would be horses that those who wished could ride.

Mr. Delaval had arranged it all in the best way the limited resources of the place permitted of. But there were no side-saddles to be got in the whole town! However, Miss Bronson had solved the difficulty. She had two American riding-suits with her, and one she would lend to Nadine to ride astride. When the two girls had talked about it just before dinner Nadine had been full of glee.

“Just fancy papa’s and Blenkie’s faces when they see me in boots and breeches, Sadie! They will nearly die! We must not let them catch a glimpse of us until we are starting! It will be enchanting fun.”

The maids and valets were going to be left behind at Gold Stamp, and only the smallest valises would be taken on to the mine.

Augustine, who had been given a parcel to put into Miss Pelham’s scanty luggage by Sadie’s maid, had a

look of great disapproval on her face when Nadine went up to bed. That *her* Mademoiselle should be going to put on what was nothing but the suit of a boy and ride about like a man! Well, if Mademoiselle Blenkinsop permitted it, it was not her affair—but it was hardly convenable!!!

Nadine, however, was jubilant; and when she was quite alone she pulled out the natty little garments and tried them on. Just a pair of very neat covert coating breeches and a well-tailored coat; and with her black curls tucked under a soft felt hat and a plain crêpe-de-chine blouse she looked just a pretty little boy.

But the newness of it! The delight in the unconventionality.

The childish part of her nature forgot the more serious passions of budding womanhood, and instead of thinking over her sad fate in having to marry Eustace, or indulging in sentimental heart-burnings over Bayard Delaval, her mind became only concerned with wondering what he would think of her in the new guise!

So her sleep was peaceful and sound, and she woke the next morning fresh and beautiful, with no foreboding or any presentiment that Fate in twenty-four hours would change her whole life.



## CHAPTER XI

THE morning was glorious and everybody seemed to be in the best of tempers at breakfast. Eustace, who had been given a hint by Sir Edward was a little more ardent in his attentions to Nadine. He deliberately sat beside her in the automobile with Blenkie beyond, leaving the Bronsons and Sir Edward and Mr. Delaval to go in the other car when they started for the mine.

Nadine was going through what every girl has felt when she is first in love. She was conscious that she was very disappointed and that her whole desires were with the young American.

*Why* could he not have tried to come in the same motor with her? To be so near to Eustace as they had to be, there in the back seat, was an irritation to her, especially when, dutifully, he attempted to take her hand under the rug.

She snatched it from him with scant ceremony, and carefully kept them both outside in her lap for the rest of the journey.

Eustace looked over his collar at her, affronted, and did not try any more affectionate caresses. He felt that he was growing positively to dislike his future wife.

The going was rough, the road a mere wagon-track, with deep ruts; both Miss Blenkinsop and Nadine were very much bumped about.

Gradually the cars began to get nearer the mountains and commenced to climb, passing now and then poor tramps on their way to fortune—or extinction—a weary

walk of miles in front of them. The country began to get very impressive as the desert was left behind, low pine-trees springing from the rugged crags. Most of it was marked with "monuments," that is, piles of stones four feet high, to mark the "claims" already annexed.

Then at the summit, a wonderful view met their eyes far down below again, a vast sea of sand with high mountains all around it, some snow tipped, weirdly desolate.

Eustace made appropriate remarks now and then, but Nadine was absolutely silent. Her whole mind now was set upon Bayard Delaval.

They passed several mule teams dragging water and provisions. The place they were going to produced neither.

When they came to a small gasoline filling station, the other car was waiting for them.

Whether the concentrated thoughts of the two young women, desiring a change of occupants, had anything to do with it or no, certain it was that somehow or another, when they all got out for a stretch, the new combination which went on again was Nadine in the middle between her father and Mr. Delaval in one car, and Blenkie, Sadie, and Eustace in the other, with Mr. Bronson beside the driver.

Sadie had probably arranged this with her usual tact.

And now the more bumpy the road, the more Nadine enjoyed herself!

Absolute thrills were running through her—as every girl has experienced when close to the man she loves.

Mr. Delaval was being an intelligent guide, that

would seem to be all. He talked principally to Sir Edward, but when some particularly wicked piece of road threw Nadine almost into his arms, she felt somehow that he was not unresponsive. In her whole life she had perhaps never been so happy as during that hour reaching the rough mining camp.

It came in view at last, at about eleven o'clock, after they had come down from the mountain and crossed the sand plane into the desert again. Gold Rock was just a cluster of rough shanties, and canvas lean-to's and tents, and a few boarded stores, and the sheriff's office, and a board hotel, which had been run up in the last four months.

Everybody was much interested and amused. And the ladies were shown to their rooms by the quaint western landlady—a desert character beloved by all the miners within miles.

What Mrs. O'Hara did not know about the natures of men was not worth mentioning!

“Come along, dearie,” she said to the aghast Blenkie; “tain't a palace, but we'll give yh' the best we can.”

Miss Blenkinsop resented greatly being called “dearie” by such a “person.” But Nadine and Sadie delighted in the jolly corpulent creature, and laughed heartily with her, when they had left Blenkie safely in her room.

These bedrooms were the most primitive places—common iron or wooden beds, a battered chest of drawers, an absurdly distorted mirror over it, and the most uninviting-looking wash-basin and pitcher on an upturned box; while bits of ragged calico hung at the



window for curtains, and a patchwork quilt covered the bed Nadine was to have.

They had each a room, however, which was a rare luxury in these parts!

“ See I’ve put yh’ a clean toilet cover, for yhr dandy brushes and combs,” Mrs. O’Hara announced with a heavy wink, and her tongue in her cheek, as she pointed to the newspaper freshly laid over the board top of the chest of drawers. Then, gurgling with fat laughter she left them.

“ Now what I’ve done,” confided Sadie in Nadine’s ear, is to make poppa get off in the motor with your dad, leaving Mr. Pelham and Mr. Delaval to ride with us. They’ll start first, because Mr. Delaval says the automobile road is much farther round than the track we shall take, so they won’t see your get-up until we get to the mine. Sir Edward will be startled, won’t he? ”

Nadine was wild with glee, and Sadie left her to change into the riding things.

Miss Blenkinsop was to remain behind, as she had no head for swinging into the bowels of the earth, she confessed; and before the two girls emerged from their rooms on to the narrow landing, she had already retired to a much-needed rest.

Blenkie was a woman not much past forty, but “ old maid ” was stamped on every line of her; and only a stern sense of duty could make her alter her regular habits, and duty to see the riding party start did not seem to be calling her.

Nadine felt aggrieved that there was no mirror in her room, where she could see how she looked in her

boy's clothes—only the tiny thing above the chest of drawers.

She felt very shy and very excited as she pulled her neat riding-boots onto her tiny feet, and stood in her crêpe-de-chine blouse and the covert-coating riding-breeches, then came the coat and hat and gloves, and, taking her hunting-crop, she was complete.

But for quite five minutes she had not the pluck to go into the passage, and was standing hesitating, when Bayard Delaval's deep voice could be heard calling from beneath the window: "Are you ready, Miss Pelham? We ought to start."

So Nadine plucked up courage and boldly went down.

Sadie was already there, perfectly at home in her costume, as it was the natural American riding-dress. Eustace had just told her how charming she looked. But when Nadine appeared he could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. She seemed the most delicious little figure and utterly unlike anything she had ever looked before. Her black curls escaped from the soft felt hat in a way none of her family would have approved of.

If Sadie had not been in the same costume, Eustace would have expressed his feelings to his fiancée. Bayard Delaval, on the contrary, found Nadine every thing that was attractive. She had not the slightest look of an Englishwoman, she might have been some slender gipsy boy.

She was as light as a feather as he mounted her on to the back of one of the not-too-wild-looking nags which were all Gold Rock could boast of; then he sprang into the saddle of another beside her and off they started.

Nadine, now thoroughly at home and in her element, was as gay as a schoolboy. Anything to do with a horse came naturally to her.

She had quite determined that to-day she meant to enjoy herself, cost what it might of her father's anger. She meant to keep Mr. Delaval with her and just let herself go.

Sadie and Eustace were mounted now, and the four started out of the camp in high spirits; Nadine's rebuff to him during the drive had eased Eustace's conscience in regard to his flirtation with Miss Bronson, and he too meant to enjoy his day. And no black care rode behind any of the horsemen.

Nothing could surpass the wildness of the country they rode through—sage brush and huge rocky crags, and then parts where even there was no living thing.

Sometimes one pair was ahead, and sometimes the other, and now and then all four halted to gaze at a view.

"It looks just the place for rattlesnakes," said Sadie lightly. "I should not care to be walking off the track."

Nadine had read Oliver Wendell Holmes's story, *Elsie Venner*; the subject of rattlesnakes fascinated her, but somehow she had never thought of them as realities.

"Are there truly snakes here?" she asked Bayard as they rode ahead.

"Quite a number of them; they are one of the miner's curses when he is prospecting—I loathe snakes."

"I had the strangest dream about them when we were on the private car one afternoon. I had never thought of them before in my life."

He looked interested. "What was it?"



“ I dreamt that there was a coil of them and one came after me, and it sprang at me to bite, but I thrust it from me, and it undulated away ; and after it had gone I felt dreadfully sorry. Now was not that perfectly silly to have felt sorry that a snake *hadn't* bitten one ! ”

“ Yes, it is curious. I suppose your eye had seen a rattler from the train window, without consciously registering the fact. Our dreams are generally about something which has affected the subconscious mind during the day, but sometimes, very rarely, they seem to have some weird significance. I have one which recurs from time to time in my life. It is a simple stupid thing about a game of baseball I played when I was a kid, and whenever it comes I know that I have to look out. I had it a night or two ago ; the time before that was when a brute called Black Ranger shot me from behind a scrub.”

Nadine looked concerned.

“ I hope nothing is going to happen in the mine.”

He laughed carelessly.

“ Oh, it breaks the spell if you tell of warnings or presentiments. I'm sure to be all right.”

Then he told Nadine interesting stories of the mining camp. He was determined not to let himself get out of hand. If at the end of the trip he saw plainly that the engagement of Eustace Pelham and Nadine was really as distasteful to them both as it appeared to be, then it might be a different thing. But in any case the life in the rough mining camp was not the kind of thing he would like to offer any girl—and his would lie here for the next year. So the outlook in every way was not promising.

Perhaps that had something to do with the reserve which Nadine suddenly felt had fallen upon him.

She liked his appearance this morning. He wore the miner's breeches and riding-boots and spurs, and a silk shirt with no tie and the neck quite open, and a slouch felt hat and loose Norfolk jacket. There was something picturesque and unconventional about this western dress, and it showed his lean active figure. Every moment Nadine was becoming more in love with him.

Just before they reached the shaft of the mine where the works were going on, Eustace had the great intelligence to come up and join them, and Bayard fell back to Sadie so that when they came in sight of the two elderly gentlemen, the couples were assorted just as they should have been all the way.

Sir Edward remarked this with pleasure, and felt glad he had given Eustace a timely hint before breakfast.

He was absolutely horrified, however, when he saw his daughter close in this boy's suit, and Sadie, seeing a storm impending, took the bull by the horns.

"Now don't be cross, Sir Edward, at Nadine wearing my things. We never ride any other way out here, and they are perfect to go down the mine in."

This was incontrovertible. So Sir Edward was obliged to swallow his displeasure. Lunch had been sent on for them—primitive sandwiches, but they had the merriest meal, and then they put on canvas overalls and sou'westers, and were ready to go down the mine.

They went first in a sort of big bucket, four at a time, on a gradual slant downwards, and then they got out at a kind of stage, and Nadine and Sadie had to

step on to a narrow board, with an iron support going up through it and a cross-bar at the top, attached to the chains. They clung to the centre-piece, and Mr. Delaval and a mine manager, who had joined them, stood beyond the girls, also holding on the bar and with the other arm tight round their waists.

It is a very strange feeling to be standing on a board suspended in mid-air on a loose chain, clinging to an iron post, and both girls felt immensely excited. Nadine, so close to Bayard in the pitch dark, quivered in his arms, and he had to use the whole of his will not to bend his head and kiss her.

But fortunately the commonplace level was kept by Sadie's remarks and giggles. So at last they arrived six hundred feet below, and the cage went back for the rest of the party. And now Bayard Delaval took command. I suppose all mines are alike, whether they are for gold or silver, uncanny terrifying places to the uninitiated. And when they began to go along the tortuous passages, each carrying a lighted candle, where the air was by no means perfect, Nadine could only remember the omen of Bayard's dream. What if something was going to happen to him.

She hardly heard all his explanations about high grade. She felt she wanted to slip her little hand into his, and implore him to take her out and come with her to safety. She controlled herself, but her heart beat to suffocation, and at last—after hours it seemed—they would soon be starting for the earth's surface again.



## CHAPTER XII

WHEN the big bucket began to reach upper air, Nadine's spirits revived, but she was very pale.

"I hate your mine!" she said, when they reached the top of the shaft and stood once more in the sunlight. "Oh, how divine to breathe again;" and before Sir Edward and Mr. Bronson and the managers and head officials could take off their overalls, the four young people had moved towards the horses again.

"Who'll race me back to the hotel?" Nadine cried, as Bayard mounted her, and without waiting to see who would come with her, she galloped ahead.

Sadie did not too greatly encourage her nag to follow at that break-neck pace, and Eustace, who had mounted last, was obliged—not unwillingly—to stay with her.

Two hundred yards farther on Bayard Delaval caught up Nadine.

All the Pan-spirit in her was in ascendance. She was so thankful to have escaped some imaginary danger. She made her mount cavort and show some life, and Bayard had to spur his beast to keep up with her. He called to her, because without heeding she had struck the wrong track. When he came alongside of her, he put his hand on the bridle.

"Did you want to run away from me, Miss Pelham, alone into the wilds? You have taken the wrong turn, you know."

“Have I?” she laughed. “How delightful! We have been doing the right thing in all those horrible hours down in your Hades. One could never be really lost up here in the light.”

“You don’t want to turn back, then, and go the way the others have gone?”

“Not I. I want to find a track for myself, even if it penetrates into the unknown.”

“Very well. It is not unknown to me, though; it is a few miles out of the way, that is all. It comes near to a shack I built last year, which I retire to when I want to work out some mining problem entirely alone. I don’t believe another soul now knows of its existence; the boys who helped me build it went east last fall.”

“It must be wonderful to be quite alone out here, with only Nature—I envy you.”

“It is a pretty rough life, and not fit for your dainty feet.”

“It depends what one wants life to mean to one.” She was more serious now.

“Have you any idea what that would be?” He rode quite close to her and tried to look into her eyes, which were lowered.

“Vaguely. I would want it to mean that I mattered the whole world to some one—not that I was just an ornament or a duty. I would like to help the person I was fond of to succeed in his career; I would like to give the ‘embroidered sleeve,’ as the Lady of Frussasco gave—Bayard—in my story-book.”

She had paused a little in the pronouncing of the

word Bayard, and it thrilled him. He whistled the tune of Montrose's Love Song softly, and then sang the words of the last verse, in his musical bass voice :

“ But if no faithless action stain  
Thy love and constant word,  
I'll make thee famous by my pen  
And glorious by my sword.  
I'll serve thee in such noble ways  
As ne'er was known before,  
I'll deck and crown thy head with bays,  
And love thee more and more.”

“ That is what giving your ‘ 'broidered sleeve ' would mean to a man, I should think,” he said.

“ That is what would make life perfect—and then the place would not matter ; ” and she sighed. He would have spoken some eager word, but she went on quickly :

“ When did you learn that song? It is so old, and so very Scotch.”

“ I had a Scotch aunt who used to sing it when I was a boy, and it appealed to me.”

“ You would always want to rule? ”

He began to sing again :

“ My dear and only love, I pray  
That little world of thee  
Be governed by no other sway  
But purest monarchy.  
For if confusion have a part,  
Which virtuous souls abhor,  
I'll call a synod in my heart  
And never love thee more.”

“ What an arrogant creature! So you would not allow the poor lady whom you loved ever to have any other amusement? ”



The song seemed to express all his views, for he sang again :

“And in the empire of thy heart,  
Where I should solely be,  
If others do pretend a part  
Or dare to share with me:  
Or committees if thou erect,  
Or go on such a score,  
I'll smiling mock at thy neglect,  
And never love thee more.”

They both laughed softly.

“You would not be angry then—just indifferent?”

“Yes; nothing is worth holding in a woman if she wants to go away from you; and if she was so vain and fickle as to desire others for her vanity, she would not be worth loving.”

“It should be the same for both.”

“Of course; love is not love when either acts towards the other just from duty, or has room in the heart for any other interest.”

Nadine was thrilling all over. This is the kind of love she had always dreamed of. Then she asked him about his career, because she felt they were getting on too dangerous ground. The horses were going at walking pace now.

“I would like to be so rich that I could be quite free to give my whole brain to something higher than making money. Then I would like to think out, and then carry out, some scheme which would benefit and help numbers of people that I now see staggering under burdens without the sense to get them off their backs

themselves, and with no one to show them how to do so."

Nadine was listening, profoundly interested.

"The worst of it is out here the chase of the Almighty Dollar is such a call, it seems to warp the souls of fellows after a while, and they lose their ideals. I'd like to help in the Government. My old dad always says that our politics are too corrupt for decent people to bother with them, but that's the very reason I'd like to plunge in, to try and make them better."

His face was so strong and keen, and his clear eyes seemed to be looking ahead always at something fine. The spiritual Pelham part of Nadine became exalted. She took pride in him, as her father would have done, had Bayard been his son.

Oh, how wonderful it would be to help such an one to do great things, instead of having to follow a backboneless, uninterested Eustace!

This last thought came with such a stab that she suddenly spurred her horse, and it bounded ahead, and the quick movement roused her joyous spirit again. She laughed back at Bayard! She knew now that she would probably be scolded for riding on ahead with him, even if they got back to the hotel at the same time as the others.

Her sudden spring forward had left him time to think, and he knew he had better begin to put more control upon his emotions, because he was utterly fascinated. It was very difficult, though, to keep up a dignified reserve with a mischievous Nature sprite, which is what Nadine appeared, looking back at him.

They heard the motors come along the main track and pass on, and Nadine laughed delightedly.

“Oh, how divine that we are not being chased by them. They will go on their stupid, good old respectable way—back to Blenkie!” and she made her horse bound again forward. Bayard’s sense of exaltation and freedom rose too; it was all a joy, no matter what his good resolutions might be.

He came up beside her and put his hand on her rein, bringing the horses level.

“Doesn’t it show how silly dreams are, and sentiments and things,” Nadine said presently, letting the bridle hang loose upon her horse’s neck, and slackening into a walk. “Here we shall be at the hotel in another quarter of an hour, I suppose, and nothing has happened to us; it is quite dull.”

“It will take rather longer than that;” and Bayard smiled quietly. “We are a good many miles away still. Look, I want to take you up to that canyon, and show you one of the weirdest views you have ever seen.”

The country was indescribably wild. The huge boulders and rocky crags jutting out of sandy, stony soil; strange desert wildflowers of apricot and heliotrope seemed to spring from barren earth amidst the sage brush. Not a bird was in the air; the late afternoon sun was growing lower and the shadows had become tinged with turquoise and violet.

It seemed as though they were alone together in some dominion of their own. When they came to a more open space, Bayard said:

“Let us dismount now for a few minutes; the horses



cannot climb where I want to take you, and they are such quiet old nags they'll stand."

Nadine pulled her rein, pleased to do anything which kept them away from the others a little longer. She was experiencing such joy, the Scotch would have said she was "fey."

Some kind of wonderful moment seemed to be near. She analysed nothing, but Nature was whispering to her that soon she must be in his arms, and let fathers, and fiancées and engagement rings rip. But because her desire seemed so near, that contrariness in woman came uppermost, and she sprang lightly to the ground without waiting for him to help her; and while he tied the horses' bridles together, she climbed up a great stone. He joined her, and soon they reached the canyon, and the most astonishing picture met their view. They were on the very edge of a vast abyss unsuspected until the climb was made.

Forbidding crags clustered all around, and away across the colossal chasm the rocks looked the colour of purple hyacinths in the lowering light. The sky was opal above them, turning to rose and gold in the west.

It was intensely hot and still.

The impossible seemed to have happened.

"The time, and the place, and the loved one—all together!"

Bayard came close to Nadine, leaning against the rock behind them. Every nerve in them both quivered with the force of awakening love. The girl's heart beat in her throat.

"Here we are," he whispered, "like eagles in an aerie, and this desert is our Garden of Eden, for now

there are no other people but just our own two selves in all this world.”

She turned her face towards him, and he saw the passion in her eyes.

She was his mate. Surely she loved him, and he who knew all about passion and the delirium of it could teach her to know every joy. He loved her. Who should dare to come between them? No parent, no lag-gard-in-Love! They belonged to one another. Two fierce primitive natures who would understand the same things.

His hesitation was gone now. Love was the arbiter; there was no more any question of a fair game. If Eustace meant nothing to her, why should she be tied to him? That was an unfair game.

He put out his strong hand and touched her little gloved one, holding her hunting-crop.

“Nadine . . . I love you,” he cried, and would have taken her in his arms.

A hundred yards down in the open space the two quiet horses waited patiently.

But what was that stealthy, sinuous, glistening thing which suddenly began gliding towards them from the sage brush?

Their eyes started from their heads in terror, and with wild snorts they broke away and galloped towards the path.

Nadine felt that everything in her was melting and that her whole being was merged in Bayard; but before she could answer him or his lips meet hers in a fond kiss, they both heard the horses move, and, startled, they stood upright. Bayard knew that the situation

brooked no delay ; he released Nadine and bounded down the crags in the vain attempt to head the animals at the turn, and as he crossed the sage brush, unseen by either of them, the great snake struck at him ; but he had passed beyond its range.

The seriousness of what was happening did not present itself to Nadine ; she was annoyed that anything should have interrupted the divinest moment of her life, but this was only another phase of the perfect day's adventure, and she prepared to descend and help in the chase. The snake was coiled again, its cunning head raised and alert.

Nadine had taken off one of her gloves in her agitation, and now she paused a moment. Bayard was calling to her :

“ They have gone past the turn ; we will never catch them now. It looks like a long hike for us ; ” and he started to come back to her.

She laughed gaily and waved her glove at him, never seeing that Death was very near, ready to strike.

The glove slipped out of her hand, and fell sharply against the great coiled reptile at her feet.

With eyes still fixed upon Bayard, she bent to pick it up, when, with a hideous rattle, the serpent raised itself and buried its fangs in her left shoulder, and the poison entered her blood.

She started back with an agonized shriek, and the snake, having spent its venom, undulated away among the grey rocks before Bayard could reach the spot.

Frightful horror convulsed him when he realized what had occurred, and he covered the ground between them with great strides ; Nadine was in an agony of



terror and pain. She vaguely knew that soon she might have to die—and life was very sweet. But Bayard Delaval never lost his head. He put his arms round her and tore her coat off, then the sleeve from her blouse—and there were the two ominous purple marks. The place had not yet had time to swell. Not a moment was to be lost.

While he held the terrified girl firmly with one arm to prevent her struggling, he found his knife with the other hand, and opened it with his teeth.

Her agonized eyes watched him. When she saw what he meant to do, she screamed, and unconsciously struggled frantically to get free.

She was down to primitive instincts now, all civilized training had fallen from her in her fear. She would have bitten him if she could. He held her arms still as in a vice, and with what tenderness the desperate situation permitted of, he cut into her shrinking olive-ivory flesh; and when the blood spurted he sucked the ugly wound to draw the poison out. But by then, after one sobbing sigh of anguish, Nadine had fainted and fallen limp in his encircling arms. Her hat fell from her head and her short curls, released from most of their few pins, tumbled in a thick mass over his coat sleeve.

With a cry of grief and misery, Bayard held her passionately to his heart.

## CHAPTER XIII

WHEN seven o'clock came, and Sadie Bronson and Eustace rode up to the hotel door at Gold Rock, without the other two young people, Sir Edward, who had arrived half an hour before, and was smoking on the veranda with Mr. Bronson and some of the mine officials, rose and came towards them. He was annoyed. This was not a suitable pairing of the quartette, and Eustace had no right to let it have come about.

Sadie, as usual, smoothed the situation. "We were racing back, and Nadine was ahead, and must have taken the wrong turn, Sir Edward, because Mr. Delaval tore after her—I suppose, to point it out to her—and we missed them. We thought we should have found them here before us."

Sir Edward could not express his displeasure in words but Eustace felt that he was very angry, and like all weak natures, knowing himself to be in the wrong, he blamed others.

"Nadine would not keep alongside of any of us," he said shortly. "To go as fast as she could was all that concerned her."

And having assisted Sadie to dismount, he entered the hotel, and went up to his room to change.

Sadie was radiant. She had "brought Eustace along," as she expressed it to herself, and had made him feel that she was the only companion who would not bore him. The flirtation was no longer tentative, but a clear fact. She stayed on the veranda, saying

delightful things to the irate parent of Nadine, until she had soothed him, rocking herself to and fro in one of the several rocking-chairs.

“They’ll be here in a minute, of course; nothing could happen to them, and Mr. Delaval knows the way.”

Miss Blenkinsop came out of the door, knitting in hand. She loathed rocking-chairs—most undignified seats, she considered them.

And when Miss Bronson offered her one, she bit her head off. The worthy Blenkie was so unhinged by Nadine’s non-appearance; she had some uncomfortable feeling that it was not accidental. She knew the signs of the times and that Sir Edward was very annoyed.

Half an hour passed—Sadie keeping the conversation even—and then she went into the hotel.

“I suppose we’ll have supper about eight-thirty,” she said, kissing her hand to her father. Eustace had not reappeared.

Quarter to nine came before she descended again, and the party were assembled waiting on the veranda—very hungry and impatient. The head mining officials and the sheriff were of the party.

The culprits had not put in an appearance. Sir Edward was now very anxious. He knew Nadine’s awe of him would never have allowed her to stay behind deliberately like this; something must have happened to them. The different people all said the things that people do say under such circumstances, and one mine manager vouchsafed the explanation that:

“Once you got off the track you’d need a compass to land you anywhere.”



Blenkie was so inwardly agitated that her knitting needles absolutely flew in and out as she made her body sit still and bolt upright.

“Ought not we to go and look for them?” Eustace suggested half-heartedly. He was convinced that no matter what had occurred, Bayard Delaval was quite capable of taking care of a woman, and he had a shrewd suspicion that Nadine would enjoy an adventure with him!

As they all stood there peering into the darkness which comes so suddenly in those western climes, the sound of horses trotting could be heard in the distance, and the tension upon Sir Edward’s face relaxed a little.

Yes, two horses were approaching the open space where the hotel stood on the other side of which was the stable shed; but as the tired animals passed the veranda, the lights from the windows showed that they were riderless.

The men made a rush across the dusty ground just as the man who attended to them caught their dragging and broken bridles.

No, there were no marks of an accident; the horses had not fallen.

Everything pointed to the rider’s having dismounted, and that then the horses had broken away.

Blank looks came on to faces, and then one jolly engineer laughed.

“Guess they’ve stopped off to look at the sunset,” he said, “and it’ll be a long hike back.”

Anger now had quenched anxiety in Sir Edward, and even Eustace felt aggrieved. His fiancée had no

business to take interest in sunsets ; it was most unladylike to make scandals in this way.

“ If you think they are walking, we will go to meet them,” Sir Edward announced in a frigid voice.

And as quickly as possible two motors were brought round, and when they had their coats, he and Eustace got into one of them with a driver who knew the way, while two mine officials started in the second one towards the only other possible path which came in from the direction of the mine.

Sir Edward's face was set in a mask of stone. He was too reserved a person to vent his fury upon Eustace, whom he felt was partly to blame, because if he had shown proper attention to his fiancée she would not have had the opportunity to dismount with the attractive young mining engineer !

So both men remained in grim silence, feeling that some climax must occur.

Unless Nadine had the most perfectly proper explanation to offer, Eustace felt his dignity would not permit him to go on with the affair. He did not analyse his motives, or he would have discovered that inclination would prompt him to catch at any straw to be free.

Sir Edward was saying to himself that from now onward until her marriage Nadine should not leave his own or Miss Blenkinsop's side, and that the marriage should take place the moment they returned to England, which would be within a month. They drove back all the weary miles to the mine.

Not a trace of the pair could they find. The sleepy watchmen had seen nothing, and heard nothing. So

at about midnight they turned back again, Sir Edward a prey to alternate anger and fear.

When they got to the hotel once more the other motor had also returned after a fruitless search.

Almost wild with anxiety now, Sir Edward insisted upon starting out again. There must be some branch paths; they would follow every one.

Eustace's ill temper increased with every mile. He felt that he hated Nadine.

They reached the mine for the second time just after three o'clock, and here a watchman, more awake than his mates, suggested that about a mile down the track there was a turn-off, concealed by a great rock, which they would not be likely to notice in the dark, but which led to a bridle-path which eventually got back to the camp.

So the two weary men entered the motor once more, and proceeded very slowly, examining every yard of the way; they were too anxious to remember how hungry they were!

At last, after diligent search, they came to what appeared to be the longed-for turn, and they went along it on an impossible road.

After about half an hour's creeping over stones and in ruts, just when the eastern sky had begun to change, Sir Edward, peering from one side, called a halt.

There was a light not very far away up the mountain side. Could they be there? But in any case perhaps some information might be obtained about them. Both men got out quickly, and told the driver to wait for them there.



But what was that sound which suddenly met their ears, floating across to them in the still air? Surely it was weird Russian music? Sir Edward held his breath, for now he could distinguish the tune. Some one, or a gramophone, was playing "The Red Sarafane."

"My God! Eustace, do you hear that?" he said in a broken voice—"Come on."

## CHAPTER XIV

**W**AS she to die, this beloved creature, just when it seemed that their love would burst all bonds and declare itself?

No!—not if human resource and will could save her.

Bayard looked about wildly for a second, but he knew that no help would come from outside. It was a million to one that anyone would ever pass that way by chance.

There to the north, farther up the mountain, on the other side of the path, his little shack could just be seen,—a tiny shanty of rough boards.

He lifted his unconscious burden high, she seemed as light as a baby to the big, strong man, and soon he was striding up the hill with her, and at last he reached the shanty and pushed open the door.

It was just a boarded room, with an old wooden bed in one corner covered with some dark-looking blankets. Up on the shelves the rough beams made, there were specimens of quartz in bags, waiting to be tested, and a few implements and a pair of scales were on the big wooden writing-table, with a lamp upon it; there was another table at the other side, a couple of the most primitive chairs stood about, a box for a washing-stand, a small cupboard, and a brand-new Victrola, with a pile of records, standing on another box completed the furniture.

Bayard put his precious bundle tenderly down on the

bed, then he rapidly went to the cupboard and got out a glass and a bottle of whisky—real Scotch, in spite of prohibition! The bottle was about three-parts full. He filled the tumbler to the brim, and took it over to the bed.

Nadine lay like a log. He raised her in his arms gently and forced the glass between her lips. It almost seemed that his touch revived her, for her eyes opened for a moment, and he poured some of the spirit down her throat.

The choking completely awoke her.

“You must drink this,” he said sternly. The danger to her permitted of no delay for persuasion. The gipsy half of Nadine was the only part of her spirit which seemed conscious, and it immediately recognized a master, and swallowed the whisky in gulps. If she hesitated for a moment, Bayard spoke again with a tone of firm authority. He did not stop until she had taken the whole big tumblerfull. Then he let her lie back on the pillow, and he covered her up with the coarse brown blankets. If he had been in time he believed she would now be saved; the great quantity of whisky would counteract the poison, as every miner knew. But had he been in time?

Nadine seemed to fall into a semi-conscious torpor; but when he felt her pulse, her heart was beating a little more strongly. So he could leave her for a moment to prepare to wash the wound.

He poured more whisky into some water, and then very tenderly bathed the place, putting on a bandage of a torn-up handkerchief as well as he could. She let him



do as he liked, with her eyes half closed and breathing heavily.

Then when the bandage was finished, he settled her once more on the bed. And now she seemed to fall into a drugged sleep.

By this time the sun had set, and the short twilight of rosy crimson pervaded the room.

Bayard sat down and watched. Nadine began to toss restlessly in about half an hour, and darkness fell upon the place.

He got up and lit the lamp, and wound up the little cheap clock on the table by his watch; it was eight o'clock. Sir Edward and the rest would have begun to wonder what could have become of them by now.

He went back to the bed; the strain he had suffered was telling a little, he felt tired now that his anxiety was lessened. A sip of whisky would have been a very nice thing; but he must not waste a drop of it. She would have to have some more, if this amount did not seem to be producing a lasting effect. He was hungry too. But he had often been in situations of real hardship, and it never even entered his head that he had now any wants unfulfilled. His whole mind was fixed upon the sleeping girl.

One crisp black curl lay over on the pillow; he touched it reverently with his fingers. Even in her heavy sleep she seemed conscious of his nearness, for a half-smile stole over her lips for an instant. He had a strong desire to lift her into his arms, and let her sleep on his breast, or rock and soothe her like a baby; but some chivalrous instinct made him feel that he must

not take the least advantage of the situation to gratify any of his own desires.

So hour after hour she slept on, moaning sometimes, and from time to time he wetted the bandage on her shoulder. Then he would stretch himself and go to the door to look out.

He did not draw the cheap checked cotton curtains over the two windows—better that the light should be seen, if by some fortunate chance help should come.

Not a sound could be heard, except an occasional faint rustle, as some reptile or lizard passed among the brush. The stars were very bright, and a crescent waning moon had just arisen in the east.

The little clock struck half-past two. Nadine had been sleeping more peacefully in the last quarter of an hour, and Bayard sat down in the chair by the writing-table and rested his head in his hands. He had almost slipped into the unconsciousness of sleep for a second, when he was aroused by a movement on the bed. Was Nadine awakening? He went to her, but she had sunk back again.

All the top of her sleeve was wrenched away, her blouse was very disordered, but there were hardly any blood-marks.

Her round young throat gleaned ivory against the dark holland pillow. The fine lace and pale pink *crépe-de-chine* of her under-bodice just showed where the blouse was torn open, and all the beautiful neck was bare.

A bright flush was in her cheeks now. Even in this unnatural sleep, she was utterly attractive to the young mining engineer.

He sat down beside her, and now began clearly to think.

What would this sinister adventure mean in the working of Fate?

Would it draw them nearer, or would it part them? How he loved her! He realized the magnitude of his passion from the agony which the thought that she might die had brought him.

“My darling—my little girl,” he murmured over and over again.

What did she really feel for him beyond the physical attraction which he knew united them both?

She knew nothing of his status in life. For her he was probably just some one whom she was attracted by, but of whose worldly position she had taken no count, not thinking of him as a possible husband. He understood that her bringing up, and the European point of view, would certainly make her consider a mining engineer not of the same rank as herself, so that it would be love alone which would make her give herself to him. This was a glorious thought.

He would never let her know that he had fortune and breeding behind him, until she was really his own—if he could help it.

Sir Edward would make an awful fuss, and certainly refuse his consent. They would have to have a run-away marriage. Then he would take her down to his old Virginia home, and give her a surprise—something of its old-world atmosphere and state would remind her of England. And how his father and his widowed aunt, who lived with them, would rejoice! And all the dear old darkie servants would adore her.



He could see "Aunt Dinah," his aunt's old maid, and "Uncle Ephraim," the white-haired butler, grinning from ear to ear.

The whole family had longed for him to marry since he was twenty-five.

Thus his thoughts ran on, each one thrilling him. Then the clock struck three, and as though the sound had awakened her, Nadine started into a sitting position.

It would be safest to give her more whisky, Bayard felt.

So he poured more into the tumbler, and now, with what he had used to bathe her shoulder, the bottle was empty.

She was gazing about her in a dazed way, and shrinking every other moment with the pain. He came over to her with the half-filled glass.

"You must drink some more," he said.

She took it obediently and swallowed about a third, and then pushed it from her.

"Now you must lie down again," he commanded, and she sank back and closed her eyes.

He covered her up, fearing to speak, in case of rousing her completely; so he took the chair by the writing-table again, after he had replaced the glass beside the bottle on the table by the door.

He felt that he could not look at her, the temptation to take her in his arms was so great.

Half an hour passed.

Then suddenly Nadine sat up.

He went to her at once and made his voice stern.

"You must lie down." She gave a little whimper,

as a child would in distress, and then she snuggled into the blankets.

He sat on the bed beside her and covered her up once more. She shut her eyes, and he remained sitting there for a moment—to see what she would do.

Then her little hand stole up and caressed his face leaning above her.

Her touch made him quiver.

He put the hand back again under the clothes.

“You must go to sleep,” he said. “Do you hear, ‘Miss Pelham’?”

Now her face filled with mischief; she seemed to have forgotten the pain in her shoulder. She was lying there pouting and looking up at him out of half-shut, alluring blue eyes.

“Bayard,” she lisped. “‘Miss Pelham’, indeed!—I am Nadine—and you are my lover.”

The first tumbler of whisky had killed the poison and saved her life. Could this last small quantity have intoxicated her a little? Bayard wondered. It was not wont to act that way after severe snake-bites, but——

And then suddenly he realized that at all events all inhibitions were numbed in her brain, and the real Nadine was gazing at him with soft voluptuous eyes.

*In vino veritas.*

Every vestige of the civilized English girl seemed to fall from her as she looked up at him. She was the wild Russian gipsy, with every art to entice a man to heaven or hell at her finger-tips.

“I must sit up,” she said. “Bayard, why won’t

you let me?" She struggled into a sitting position. "I want to stretch."

Short of holding her in bed by force, he could not now prevent her from rising, and he was afraid of the temptation if he should touch her.

She put her feet to the ground.

"You see, I am all right;" and she held out her arms to him. "I thought you loved me. Don't you?"

He came over to her.

"My God! You know I do. But you have been awfully ill; that is why you must rest."

"I won't rest—without you."

She caught hold of his shirt-sleeve and rubbed her cheek up and down it. He had taken off his coat to make an extra cover for her feet, when he had first laid her down.

She was utterly provoking—no caressing tricks that he could imagine seemed to be unknown to her—and her eyes were temptation itself, magnetizing him with their voluptuous passion.

"You must lift me, Bayard. I want to be in your arms."

He controlled his rising emotion, and picked her up and laid her on the bed again.

There were apparently no pins in her hair at all now—the few that had remained had fallen into the bed—it fell just to her neck in thick black curls.

The bright pale scarlet flush was in her cheeks, her lips were very red and pursed up as though asking for kisses.

Bayard tried to be matter-of-fact.

He went and got the basin of whisky and water



again, to moisten the bandage once more. She kept laughing at him, and when he tried to put it on, she turned and kissed his fingers, and bit one of them gently like a little animal at play.

Bayard's pulses were bounding. How was he going to resist this adorable thing?

"Bayard—my knight, come to set me free," she whispered, as though repeating something learned. "I could see you out of the window, and I knew at once you were my lover and my lord. Why did not you stay that day instead of Eustace? But you will never leave me now—never again, will you? Promise me."

"Of course not," he said hoarsely, at his wit's end, because her little hands again were caressing his face.

"You are my lover, Bayard. Why are you so cold?"

"I'm not cold. Only you don't know how ill you have been. The snake bit your shoulder."

"Oh, what do I care for snakes! I am here alone with you, and I am going to stay with you always away from the silly old world. Bayard, tell me you love me." Woman's eternal question!

All the deep-down, primitive instincts, suppressed all her life, were stirring in Nadine. Fear had left her; the training of years had fallen from her. She was conscious of nothing but that she was with the man she loved. Only that which was connected with him stayed in her mind, all else was forgotten; and as the spirit mounted more and more into her head, so she revealed herself to him.

Bayard was going through torture. How was he to keep from responding to her?

He had studied the working of the subconscious mind, and he believed that Nadine was now letting him see her real feelings, whether she were intoxicated or no.

Her voice was not the least thick, nor were there any of the usual signs of having taken too much whisky. Only she was utterly fascinating.

“Nadine,” he said gravely, unclasping her two tiny hands which clung to his neck, “won’t you rest just while I look out and see if they are coming to find us?”

But this roused fierce resentment.

“They shall not come! I am yours, and will stay with you—for ever.

Ah! If this could only be so. If he could only take her away with him for his very own, now without more ado! Her words awakened passionate thoughts. He too was having primitive instincts aroused!

But she was alone with him, entirely at his mercy, and perhaps she was not quite mistress of herself. He must not take the least advantage of her.

“Nadine—sweetheart—” he whispered in a choked voice. “To-morrow we will arrange everything, but to-night you must lie still and rest. Don’t you know that a snake’s bite is a dangerous thing, and I must take care of you.”

She put her hand up vaguely to her shoulder.

“It’s hot,” she said “but it does not hurt. Bayard, why don’t you take me in your arms and hold me where I want to be—my lover——?”

The young man was almost beside himself, she looked indescribably alluring, her blue eyes, bright as stars, gleaming at him with a world of passion in them,

from between her forest of black lashes. He crushed his emotion, and soothed and coaxed her, and got her to lie down at last.

Then he went out of the shack into the night. It had begun to lighten in the east; it was nearly four o'clock. His heart was beating, and his head was swimming. Not a sound could be heard.

No, they would have to stay there until the morning, and this agonizing temptation would go on. How was he going to be able to be the Knight Bayard through the hours?

While he leaned against the corner of the wall, peering towards the only direction from whence any one could approach them, he might have heard in the distance a motor stop, but his ears were startled by the Victrola within.

Nadine must have set it in motion. It was playing a new record he had brought back from Europe with him—a Russian arrangement of the old national air, "The Red Sarafane." He turned back quickly, and as he entered the door he stood still in admiration.

For it seemed a Russian gipsy was dancing there! Round and round the little figure flew, with all the stamping, fluttering, wildly voluptuous movements which only the gipsies know.

Bayard had seen the Russian ballet and various troupes of dancers at revues, so he recognized the origin of the thing.

He realized that it must be heredity showing. The Russian half of Nadine's nature was coming into its own. He grew entirely under the spell of her strange



blue eyes looking at him with sensuous passion. They were leading him—where?

She came closer and closer each time she passed, until at last she flung herself into his arms. Bayard was a strong man, and chivalrous, but he was passionately in love.

He put the sternest restraint upon himself once more, and carried her to the bed. She was exhausted by this time and should certainly rest.

She seemed to be quite docile, content that his arms held her; but when he laid her down, with one of her sudden movements she put both arms around his neck, and, raising herself, pressed her soft young lips to his.

Then madness seized him, and for one brief moment he lost control of himself, and let the wild passion he was feeling return her kiss.

Oh, the delirious joy of it! Time and place seemed to be swept away, drowned in the exquisite bliss of their first embrace!

The scratching of the Victrola needle coincided with the opening of the cabin door, and Sir Edward, white as death, strode towards them, followed by Eustace.

Truly Fate seemed to be closing in upon them with a heavy hand.

## CHAPTER XV

WHEN the two men, father and fiancé, had reached the cabin, although the climb was not more than two hundred yards or so from the path, they were both out of breath, and Sir Edward, motioning Eustace aside, went forward alone to look in at the window, and the sight which met his view was certainly calculated to arouse the worst suspicions!

From there he saw his daughter reclining on the bed, clasped in the arms of the young mining engineer, her hair dishevelled, and her blouse torn, while their lips were meeting in a passionate kiss.

“My God! The disgrace has come at last,” the poor father whispered brokenly, and, followed by Eustace, he pushed open the door and entered the room.

In all the future years of his life, no moment can ever be quite so awful to Bayard Delaval as was this one when, while his lips still met the passionate young lips of Nadine, he became aware of her father's entrance. Here he was discovered in a completely false position, and which he felt no words could explain away. He cursed his weakness. How far short he had fallen from the ideal Knight Bayard! Why, why had he given way—even for that one brief instant! He rose and drew himself to his full height and faced the two men squarely. Nadine, defiant and only angry at this interruption to her joy, still clung to him, having bounded from the bed when Bayard left her, on her father's entrance.

Eustace Pelham remained behind Sir Edward, and there at the table by the door took up the empty whisky bottle with a cynical, disgusted smile; then his eyes travelled to the pillow of the bed significantly, on which were lying two hairpins. But Sir Edward was speaking.

“I could kill you both,” he said in a voice almost inaudible from pain and shame.

“You are doing your daughter and me an injustice, sir,” Bayard Delaval said. “She has been bitten by a rattlesnake, and——”

Sir Edward interrupted him, shaking his stick.

“Far better then that it had killed her than that the Pelham name should suffer this everlasting disgrace.”

Bayard winced as at a blow, but Nadine broke in:

“How dare you speak so to my lover, papa! I love him, I want to stay in his arms and never leave him again. He is my Knight Bayard, come to set me free. Go away, you wicked man. I hate you. Leave us alone!”

Here Eustace broke in, in a tone of withering contempt:

“There seems to be only one thing that the ‘Knight Bayard’ can do then, and that is to marry the lady with the least possible delay.”

“I am ready and proud to do so immediately, sir, and give you and her father what satisfaction you may desire afterwards.” Bayard’s eyes flashed grey fire while he circled Nadine with his arm.

“Do you hear, papa? We are going to be married now.”

“Very well; it is the best thing which can happen to you. You shall come straight back to the Justice of



the Peace this minute, and he will marry you at dawn; and as for satisfaction, all that I ask of you, sir, is that you take my daughter, and that I never see either of you again."

Bayard now spoke quietly:

"Sir Edward, you are making a frightful mistake, I warn you. Will you not let me explain? Your daughter has done no wrong, but I am only too happy to marry her, if she will have me for her husband. Will you, Nadine?"

Nadine clung to his arm.

"Of course I will. Now——"

Sir Edward came close to her, and took her left hand, from which he drew the engagement ring and handed it back to Eustace.

"You *must* listen to me," Bayard said sternly. "Your daughter is ill and in pain——" and then his voice faltered a moment. *How* was he to explain away the scene that the two men must have witnessed? He could not tell them of the long hours of temptation. Nor that at last she had put her lips to his. How would they believe that she was suffering, when they had heard the Victrola, and for all he could tell had seen her dancing, like a mad thing, and then there were her own words, spoken wildly, that he was her lover. She wanted to "*stay* in his arms." What did that imply? He would be willing to fight any man to the death who said one idle word about her, but the circumstantial evidence at this particular moment looked too strong against them both. He was obliged to see the point of the other side, and raging fury at his own momentary weakness possessed him. If he had not given way to

temptation, even though it was only for those few seconds, this hideous misunderstanding could not have occurred.

If he insisted upon their seeing the truth first, might it not look as though he hesitated about marrying Nadine? But he must make one more try.

“I tell you, you are altogether mistaken in the whole thing, Sir Edward,” he said again. “Can you not see for yourself the wound in Miss Pelham’s shoulder? The rattlesnake bit her, and it is only a miracle that she is not dead. Her blouse is torn because I cut the place with my knife. That and the whisky have saved her life.”

At this Eustace made a slight exclamation as though light might be dawning in his mind; he glanced again at the empty bottle, but Sir Edward drew back with freezing hauteur.

“I do not require any explanations, sir. I am not questioning as to whether the snake bit her, or did not bite her, whether you tore her blouse or cut her shoulder, or gave her whisky, or saved her life. I request you to marry my daughter *on the evidence of my own eyes*, which saw her lying in your arms in a passionate embrace. She a girl, and a gentlewoman, and engaged to another man.”

During this speech Nadine had been rubbing her cheek up and down Bayard’s shirt-sleeve again, and evincing adoring little tricks of fondness for him; her naughty, flushed, lovely little face full of passionate love.

“Come,” said her father, with icy sternness, to hide the agony he was suffering, for he could see Nada

standing there, behaving to him in the very same way. "You can keep your caresses for when you are alone with your husband. The Justice of the Peace will, no doubt, be about when we get back, and you will not have to wait long!"

"So be it," Bayard said hoarsely; "but one day you will right this shameful wrong that you are committing against your own child. For my part I am proud and happy, for I love her, and will protect her with my life."

He took his coat off the bed and wrapped it round Nadine; her own was somewhere out on the hill. Then he lifted her in his arms tenderly to carry her to the waiting automobile; and as he did so, the last hairpin fell out of her hair on to the table by the door. He set her down for a second, and put it in his pocket, then picked her up again and strode on.

The party set forth in the dawn, down the rough craggy hill and reached the motor in silence.

Eustace got up in front by the driver, and Bayard sat down by Sir Edward in the back seat, with Nadine between them.

She laughed softly.

"Oh, I am so happy. You are so stupid to be cross, papa!"

Then she nestled up to Bayard, who encircled her with his arm.

Sir Edward sat in grim silence as they tore along, and after Nadine had whispered over and over again that she loved Bayard, and given his shoulder little kisses as she rested against it, she seemed to become drowsy. As for Bayard, he was a prey to alternate



fits of rage and joy. And so they arrived at about five o'clock in broad daylight, at the beginning of Gold Rock's main street. Here there were one or two miners standing about already, and the chief of police was talking to the Justice of the Peace and the Sheriff at his office door.

Sir Edward motioned to the driver to stop, and turning to Bayard said coldly :

“I understand that with the consent of the parent, even though the girl is under age, the marriage licence can be obtained at once, and the Justice of the Peace can perform the ceremony. I wish to lose no time. I am leaving for Gold Stamp immediately.”

Bayard roused Nadine, who opened her eyes dazedly, but let him help her out without saying a word, and his arms still encircling her, he led her into the office. She sank down on an old arm-chair in the outer room, while her father and Bayard and Eustace went beyond.

She was not conscious of what was happening, everything was a dream. And when they came back to her, and bade her come into the inner room, she rose obediently and followed them, still wearing Bayard's coat, so that the wound in her shoulder could not be seen.

All she registered for the moment was a confused murmur of voices, and that she was being told to repeat some words which had no meaning to her, and that Bayard was taking her hand and putting a bit of wire round her finger—a hairpin that he had twisted into a ring.

Then they were in the automobile again, and so to the hotel; and there was Blenkie, white as a ghost, still

on the veranda waiting, with her knitting in a hopeless tangle in her hands.

But that she ran forward and drew Nadine from Bayard's supporting arms, the poor child no longer knew, all consciousness had gone from her, and by the time they reached the miserable bedroom she dropped on to the patchwork quilt of the bed and covered her face with her hands.

"She has been bitten by a rattlesnake, Miss Blenkinsop," Bayard said to the terrified governess. "I will go for the doctor at once. Take care of her, and put her to bed meanwhile;" and he left the room.

The events of the night and everything had become a blank to Nadine, who collapsed into a kind of swoon.

## CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Sir Edward reached the hotel he had a talk with Mr. Bronson and Sadie, who after a short rest had come down again, and were in the dining-room eating some breakfast.

“A great misfortune has befallen me,” he said in an almost strangled voice. “My daughter has married our mining engineer. I would ask you to leave with me as soon as we can get away, and please do not have any communication with her.”

Joy rushed through Sadie. Here was an unexpected solution of any possible bothers which might have been ahead, and it added to her sympathy with Nadine.

“Oh, may I not just go up to her, dear Sir Edward?” she implored. “I always knew she had a crush on Mr. Delaval, and really he is fine.”

“I ask you not to go near her, Miss Bronson. She was bitten by a snake, it appears, but is all right, and I want to leave without our having any scandal or any scenes, as you can understand this is a great blow to me.”

Mr. Bronson motioned to his daughter to desist, and they pressed breakfast on poor Sir Edward and Eustace, who had just come in.

No matter what tragedies take place, people must eat.

Sir Edward's mind was made up. He would settle his interest in the mine on Nadine and never have any



connections with this country, or see her again. He was too stunned with the horror of the whole thing, and the frightful blow to his pride, as yet, to be able to think clearly, or allow natural affection to have any sway.

As for Eustace, he experienced only relief. He was now free of an irritating engagement, and had already made up his mind soon to take unto himself a scintillating American bride.

Meanwhile, up in the dingy bedroom, Blenkie was ministering to Nadine. She had undressed the unconscious girl as best she could, and there she lay in bed, with eyes closed, half-asleep and half-swooned. Underneath, in her refrigerated heart, Miss Blenkinsop loved her pupil, as indeed did every one who knew her well. Her pixie pranks might irritate, but her warm generous heart always showed in the long run. Blenkie was going through miserable anxiety until the doctor came.

He was a rough-looking man, undistinguishable from the other miners, but possessed of great skill. He had brought everything necessary to deal with snake-bite.

“Here is Doctor Heathcott to see Mrs. Delaval,” Bayard said, entering the room with him.

Miss Blenkinsop actually jumped.

“Mrs. Delaval!” she cried, aghast; then she swallowed rapidly several times. She had been sitting on the bottom of the bed watching Nadine. She had remarked the bit of twisted wire around the left third finger, and had wondered vaguely what caprice was

this, and what had become of the engagement ring? She now lifted the tiny white hand which lay limp upon the quilt, and looked more closely—the shock was great. But Blenkie was not a person to ask questions.

All she blurted out was :

“ Does Sir Edward know? ”

Bayard nodded, and making a sign to the doctor that he would wait in the passage, he left the room.

The doctor was a man of few words. He examined the wound and then sent Blenkie for water and a basin; he had heard from Bayard all the details of when the bite occurred, and the remedies which had been applied.

Miss Blenkinsop quickly did as she was told, and soon a small neat plaster covered the sore place; all this time Nadine lay with closed eyes breathing as one in a heavy sleep.

The doctor gave her some drops from a phial, and put a pique in her arm—and then he looked up at Blenkie with his wise eyes.

“ She’s out of danger,” he announced laconically; “ the whisky saved her, but she’s had a close call. She’ll sleep now, maybe for twenty-four hours, waking and slipping off again perhaps, but she won’t be herself or understand things for quite that time. Let her have milk if she calls for anything.”

Then he packed up his paraphernalia, and bowing to Blenkie quitted the room. The newly-made husband was waiting in the passage, restless with anxiety. The doctor renewed his instructions and shook hands. “ You’ve no need to worry now,” he said.

At that moment Mrs. O'Hara, the fat landlady, came up the stairs with a message from Sir Edward. Miss Blenkinsop was to pack up and join the party below, who would start for Gold Stamp as soon as she could be ready. Mrs. O'Hara entered the room with Bayard and delivered the message, while he stood looking at his sleeping bride, from the foot of the bed.

Blenkie stood up stiffly and flatly refused to go. Now that it came to the point, all her real affection for Nadine broke the bonds of restraint. She could not leave her alone ill and unconscious of what was going on.

"I shall stay, Mr. Delaval, no matter what Sir Edward says. I cannot leave the child." Then Bayard came forward and took her hand. "You are a gem, Miss Blenkinsop, after all; but if you stay it will only cause complications. Nadine will be all right now; I will take the tenderest care of her, and soon she can get her maid. But I am really grateful to you, and so will she be."

Sir Edward's voice was heard from the passage:  
"Miss Blenkinsop."

And now Blenkie did a thing which she had not done for years. Her hard mouth quivered, and then she burst into tears and buried her face in her hands.

But when she had controlled herself she bent and kissed Nadine's forehead in farewell, and with dignity shook hands with Bayard and left the room.

As he held open the door for her, Sir Edward came up the stairs, and Blenkie went on to pack.

Bayard stepped forward in the passage to meet his father-in-law.



“Sir Edward,” he said, “the doctor says your daughter is now out of danger; won’t you let me explain everything to you before you go away?”

Sir Edward’s face was white and set.

“I will make ample provision for *your wife*, Mr. Delaval. Her maid and luggage will await her at Gold Stamp, but I have no *daughter* now. Good day,” and he passed on.

Bayard straightened himself and went back into Nadine’s room.

And presently he heard the noise of the motor leaving, and he knew that the little girl was utterly alone with him—his very own.

But what a room to awaken in! He looked round at the grubby walls—at the chest of drawers with the newspaper cover, and all her gold dressing-bag things lying out on it; pretty boxes and brushes and combs. A shiver went through him.

He came over nearer to the bed. There was always something pathetic and appealing about Nadine’s tiny hands. They looked so helpless, quite unfitted to fight with life. She was extremely pale now, the red flush had quite left her cheeks, and blue shadows lay under the heavy black lashes. Miss Blenkinsop had brushed her curls. The bed was neatly arranged, nothing was disordered and there she lay breathing regularly, sound asleep.

Her thin gauzy pink nightgown was open at the neck, and short of sleeve.

Would she be chilly presently, and ought he to cover her up?

He drew the wretched clothes further over her, and as he did so a great rush of tenderness came over him, and he bent and kissed her hair.

“ My darling little wife,” he murmured, and he said a silent prayer.

Then, as there appeared no prospect of her waking, for hours, or requiring anything, he went off to snatch a bath in the men’s dressing shed and get some breakfast, locking the door after him.

And so began their wedding day.

## CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Bayard returned to his wife's room, spruce and bathed and fed, he was struck afresh by the appalling squalor of it. What could it appear to her who had never had to face any hardship, and was only accustomed to the splendour of Pelham Court. How could he ever ask her to stay with him here at the mine? No, it would be impossible. He smiled for a moment, thinking of the face of the smart French maid, if she should be brought here to her mistress!

It was all very well for one night—these luxurious people had thought it a picnic, and fun—but to have to spend weeks, and indeed two or three months here, would be quite another matter.

He would have to settle all the work he could this afternoon, and then get away on the morrow, when she would wake probably fairly all right. He would take her back to Gold Stamp to the hotel there, when at least she could have proper baths and food. But then a blankness came upon him. It would be absolutely impossible for him to stay at Gold Stamp, his place was at the mine, and Nadine was not the type to leave in an hotel alone. She who had been surrounded with care and protection all her life. He almost wished now that he had arranged with Miss Blenkinsop to wait for them at Gold Stamp. The situation was very difficult.

He stood looking at her from the foot of the bed. She was exquisitely beautiful, he thought.



On the chair, Blenkie had left her neatly folded dressing-gown, and the minute mules were on the floor beside them, all ready for her if she should wake and get up. Order was in the miserable room, if nothing else—Blenkie had seen to that. Bayard lifted the filmy silk garment and noted its softness, and its laces, and he kissed it as he put it back over the common chair. Then he picked up a slipper. "A thing for Cinderella," he said to himself, while he tenderly touched the wee pink satin toe—its little buckle a tiny bunch of pink roses.

He went over to the chest of drawers and looked at the gold dressing-table set with "Nadine" in seed pearls on each piece. Sir Edward had given it to her on her eighteenth birthday. Then he listened, for there was a noise of roistering voices coming from below. He knew this meant the advent of that fresh batch of miners from Rockers Point, whom he had heard were expected. A warm lot who would make things hum—hardly suitable hotel mates for a refined English girl.

Rockers Point was the roughest centre for two hundred miles round. Some of these men would certainly be drunk to-night. They got frightful spirits, pretending to be whisky, from goodness knows where, and the gambling would be high in the hall behind what had been the bar; and when these fresh influxes took place, he knew by experience that a quarrel with the old-timers generally occurred.

If they should ever get the smallest peck at the gold dressing-case things, as could easily happen by the opening of the door, there were one or two who might make a raid at a propitious moment.

Bayard reflected for a second, then he looked for

the dressing-bag, and began repacking the fittings in it, and then he came across, at the bottom of the case, the book of *The Story of Bayard: Sans peur et sans reproche*.

He did not realize that it was Nadine's fetish, and that she always travelled with it everywhere. It seemed mystic and full of meaning to him, finding it there. He took it up and opened the leaves; he would read it when he should be sitting watching her later on. Meanwhile, he put it on the narrow window ledge by the bed.

He would try to live up to its principles. Anger now began to swell in his heart against Sir Edward. He sat down in the battered rocking-chair, and began to think deeply. He wanted to be just. So he put himself in the father's place, and weighed up things; and gradually the picture became clearer to him.

Sir Edward Pelham was a very proud man—he remembered Nadine telling him that she was sure her father would die willingly rather than that any disgrace should fall upon the family, and that honour mattered to him more than affection, or ambition, or anything else in the world.

This being so, and the hundreds of years behind him of tradition and correct behaviour, and class prejudice affecting his point of view as well—was his action so very unnatural after all? What would he—Bayard Delaval—with the same instincts, have done in his place?

And then a dull red flush mounted to Bayard's forehead, as he thought of what that kiss and the whole scene must have suggested to eyes and minds totally unaware of any extenuating circumstances. No, of

course Sir Edward could have believed only one thing, that he—Bayard—had grossly taken advantage of his daughter and betrayed a trust. And the kiss precluded any explanation in words from being effectual—unless he had been able to tell the whole truth, that it was Nadine herself who had pressed her lips to his, and this of course was unthinkable. So at last his anger died down. Each human being must act according to his law. After all—he himself had contemplated a runaway match with Nadine some day!—and this was hardly any different, only the runaway would have been to some city, not into the wilds.

He smarted under the knowledge of his own weakness—he, and he alone, had been responsible for the situation. Nadine was certainly influenced by the whisky, and must be held blameless, whereas he had been dead sober as far as that was concerned, and only intoxicated by passion.

He ate the bitter fruit of self-reproach and humiliation to the core, and he sat there in the old rocking-chair in the dingy wretched room.

Then he registered a solemn vow to himself, with his hand on *The Story of Bayard*, that he would not allow himself to get out of hand again—no matter how she should tempt him, he would keep his head, until they could reach civilization, where the fastidious taste of neither of them could receive a rebuff. He must take no more advantage of outside circumstances and seeming moods of his beloved; he must wait until she was wide awake and came, in her full senses, into his arms. That this would be soon he never



doubted, and the waiting would be good discipline for him.

It was one o'clock in the day now and he knew that he ought to go back to the mine; he held a position of the greatest trust, and everyone concerned depended upon him. How he could possibly absent himself on the morrow he did not yet know.

But how was he to leave her in this drugged sleep all alone?

He returned to the bed, the strange contrast of the exquisite refinement of Nadine's nightgown and her white tiny hand peeping from the unbleached calico sheets, which turned over on to the wretched patchwork quilt, struck him afresh, and a great wave of irrepresible love and tenderness swept over him once more. Mrs. O'Hara had brought oddments from any old place to furnish her hotel.

What an appalling place for a honeymoon!

"As helpless as a baby," Bayard whispered to himself with moisture in his keen grey eyes.

"My little darling sweetheart wife."

He bent to kiss her gently—and then he drew back—no—not a single caress. He must remember to restrain himself.

Whom could he trust to stay with her? There were no women in the camp that he knew. There might have been a few miners' wives, but he knew nothing of their characters, and the rest of the females were not of a type to be in Nadine's presence. Mrs. O'Hara? . . . She would promise to stay and watch, but would she keep her word? . . . There was nobody but "Uncle Fredrick." Here was an idea. "Uncle

Fredrick" was a weird old crippled man, who had been a miner in his day, but now sold buttons and thread and such-like from a pack, for which he journeyed backwards and forwards to Gold Stamp to procure the merchandise. He was just a mass of kindness and good-nature, and devoted to Bayard by ties of gratitude and affection.

If he had come in, as was his custom, on a Thursday, he would be the only trustworthy person to instal as nurse.

Bayard peeped cautiously from the window—the noisy new-comers had trooped up the stairs to their rooms—and deposited their bundles, and they had now gone down again to the dining-shed for their mid-day dinner. This would be perhaps the safest moment to leave Nadine.

He bent over her once more, she was sleeping profoundly. Then he straightened himself abruptly, controlling temptation, and left the room, locking the door behind him.

"Uncle Fredrick" was found in his accustomed place on the veranda, and told briefly what was required of him. How Bayard had only just married and his wife, an English girl, had been bitten by a rattlesnake, and was still pretty ill and wanted a careful watch kept over her while he was at the mine. Would Uncle Fredrick take on the job? Just to sit quite quiet and give her milk if she woke?

The old fellow's kindly blue eyes softened. His sympathy went out to all mankind.

"Why, certainly, mate," he said, and followed Bayard's lead back into the room.

“ Well, ain’t she a peach! ” he exclaimed when he caught sight of Nadine. “ Guess that rattler knew what he was about! I’ll sit as quiet as a owl, sonny, until you come back,” and he chuckled affectionately.

So this is how the wedding day of this daughter of a great old race passed—in a rough board room in a wild mining camp, watched over by a withered kindly cripple, while her bridegroom, with an anxious troubled heart, faced his duty in the mine.

\* \* \* \* \*

The news had gone round that the “ Prince ” was married. Married to that dandy daisy—daughter of one of the bosses of the mine. The suddenness of the ceremony seemed nothing remarkable to them, accustomed to rough-and-tumble ways and rapid action.

Bayard had to stand some rather ribald chaff, but not too much of it, because he was held in awe! No one forgot the incident of Black Ranger—a handy gun is a powerful aid to being respected in a western mining camp!

But some of the gang in the gallery, where he had just passed, said to each other that the “ Prince ” looked mighty blue for a bridegroom. At that moment he *felt* mighty blue! What if Nadine should show horror of the awful room, and the rough existence ahead of them! Then he thrust those thoughts aside and grew more cheerful, for had she not said, as they rode, that to have some one who would really love her, and to whom she meant the whole world, would make life perfect; and she had added, “ and then the place would not matter.”



This thought brought return of joy—he would fulfil those conditions, for indeed he loved her beyond all the world! Oh, the burning memory of her caresses! There could be no question about her affection! No woman in his life had shown so much voluptuous passion for him. But this thought made his pulses bound again! So he made himself concentrate upon mathematical calculations which were necessary for his work just then. But as the time grew near for the men to leave the mine, a restless excitement began to possess him in spite of his will. Would she sleep on all the night, or would she wake? He would stay there beside the bed and watch her. What a superlative moment to contemplate, anyway—when he should see those white lids unclose and the love-light grow in the blue eyes!

In spite of all the troubles which seemed to be going to raise complications in the immediate future, there would be some divine hours of happiness first, when she should realize that she was alone with him. How they would talk over their absurd wedding, and the hairpin wedding ring! The new one which he would replace it with should be a narrow band of sapphires as blue as her eyes.

How docile she had been when he had put the twisted wire on her finger! Perhaps it was the solemnity of the vows they were making which had made her so quiet all that time.

When things could be settled up and he could spend weeks with her what wonderful discoveries each would make!

That she had a nature which would require “a master—and lots of love,” he quite knew. But then

he was accustomed to ruling—and passion had never been absent from his make-up!

Thus all the way back to the shanty hotel Bayard allowed himself to make plans for joy, and dream of divine things!

He would talk possibilities over with her and see what could be done about her residence. The best of the summer was before them, but presently it would be terribly hot in July and August—that was an extra difficulty. By the winter he would somehow arrange to get a month or two off, and take her to Virginia, and by next year, he would have realized his fortune sufficiently to put in a deputy, and only have to come to Nevada occasionally to supervise things.

His thoughts kept saying:

“She loves me, she loves me, as much as I love her!”

There was a great crowd of miners on the veranda; he got through them and their greetings as quickly as he could, and bounded up the stairs. At the door of Nadine's room he came upon Mrs. O'Hara with some of his clothes over her shoulder, and his valise in her hand. “We can't give you a second room, Mr. Delaval, since this posse has come from Rockers Point; but tain't likely you'd be wantin' it now you're married, I says to myself, so I'm just movin' your things!”

“I *must* keep my room, Mrs. O'Hara!”

She burst into a peal of fat laughter.

“Yu can't put over a stunt of that sort with me, my boy! Two rooms for a honeymoon! Go on!”

Accustomed as Bayard was to the outspoken desert

ways, and to Mrs. O'Hara's type of wit, he grew angry. This was a fresh and impossible complication.

"I tell you I must keep my room. Mrs. Delaval is ill and cannot be disturbed."

The hostess rocked with laughter.

"You should worry!" she gurgled. "Married this morning and two rooms to-night!"

She plopped down the valise, and the clothes, and waddled off to the stairs, firing a parting shot over her shoulder:

"Bob Larkin's snoring in your bed now, dead to the world! and Billy Bunker's going to join him on the floor! Feel inclined to clear them—and make a fight—say?"

Quivering with anger but routed, Bayard tapped gently at his wife's door—a fight could not be contemplated with Nadine there ill—and in a minute it was opened by old Uncle Fredrick—with his finger on his lips.

"She seemed to rouse half an hour ago, and I gave her milk and tucked her up, and made her comfortable again, but she never know'd where she was, nor saw me, and she's off sound now—guess she'll sleep till dawn."

Bayard carried in his things and put them in a heap in the corner—and he drew Uncle Fredrick into the passage.

"Just wait until I've bolted some supper—then I won't have to go out again."

The old man nodded, and went back into the room.

Could anything be more annoying than this!



Bayard's face was like an iron mask as he ate his supper, and no one dared address a word to him. Then he went outside and looked at the stars for a little, to steady himself.

He would require all his will, he knew! Old Uncle Fredrick was nodding when he got back into the room, and was glad to be relieved of his long vigil.

They wrung each other's hands—and then Bayard and his bride were left alone. He turned the rocking-chair so that he would not be able to see her, to lessen temptation. He made a bundle of his coat for a pillow, and lit a candle—he had bought two or three at the store—and he divided them into sections, so that they would last all night. Then he made a screen with the newspaper chest-of-drawer's cover, so that the light would not shine on Nadine's eyes—and then he went over and looked at her from the head of the bed. She was lying with one little hand under her cheek, flushed now with a more healthy sleep. Her lashes made a deep shadow, they were so thick and black and curly. There was something delicious and babyish in her whole attitude.

Passionate emotion surged through Bayard. She belonged to him! He had every right to take her in his arms, and lie down beside her and let her sleep on his heart—instead of having to sit up in that stupid old chair! And in his emotion he stretched out his arms to her, and accidentally touched *The Story of Bayard*, so that it fell to the floor from the narrow window ledge at the head of the bed—with a crash.

So heavily did Nadine sleep that her eyelids never

even quivered at the noise. Bayard bent and picked up the book. This was a warning! All his passion died down, and the insidious sophistry of his reasoning with himself became clear to him.

He had given his word *to himself*, and he would keep it.

So he took the little beautifully bound volume gratefully over to the rocking-chair, and settled himself as easily as he could in it, and began to read.

Thus began the wedding night of Bayard and Nadine!

## CHAPTER XVIII

**M**EANWHILE, Sir Edward and the rest of the party had arrived at Gold Stamp—all very silent! Sadie Bronson felt that her personal game was won, and no new effort was needed, but she had taken an affection for Nadine, and she could not bear to think that she was perhaps going to be unhappy. The impression she got of the affair was that Nadine and Bayard Delaval had run straight off to the Justice of the Peace's when they rode away, and that it was after the marriage that Sir Edward had found them. He, Sir Edward, had purposely fostered this idea.

“Poppa, it was strange Nadine having been bitten by a rattlesnake,” Sadie said to her father when they were alone; “we were only talking about them as we rode along. I thought people always died, though, if that snake did strike?”

“So they do unless the place can be cut and the poison sucked out at once,” her father told her; “and they take a lot of whisky. I don't expect she really was bitten though. I expect that this is part of the plan to get by with it all.”

Sadie agreed with him.

“Oh, poor Nadine!” she sighed. “How perfectly terrible to have to live at a mine! There is no man this side of Jordan who'd get me to do it for him.”

“I can't understand Delaval,” Mr. Bronson remarked with a worried frown; “he's the straightest chap I've ever met. He is more respected by all the min-



ers than any man in Nevada, and it does not seem quite square to run off with that child—engaged to another man too.”

“Poppa, do you think there is something underneath that we don’t know about? You’ve given me an idea—I’ll get it out of Eustace!”

But none of them then guessed that this “idea” of Sadie’s would later on make another strange turn in Nadine’s destiny!

This was not the moment to ask questions of the discarded lover though—that horse-sense which always guided Sadie, told her! This was the moment to be all that was frank and friendly and soothing to him—that was all.

Sir Edward, shrewdly suspecting that Bayard would bring Nadine immediately to Gold Stamp wanted to leave for the east as soon as possible. From Washington, where he meant to join the Crombies before going on a tour of Canada, he would make the settlement of his share of the mine on his daughter. Let her live comfortably at all events, and not be dependent upon her rascally lover.

But all that night he was haunted by dreams of Nada. She was in his arms caressing him in the way she used to do, tantalizing—retreating—advancing—biting his fingers in play—stamping her little feet, and suddenly pinching his ears! So that he awoke quivering with the pain of his loss—and his memories.

But he was as yet too hurt in his pride to realize that if Nadine had so tempted the young mining engineer, he might have found it very hard to resist her!

\* \* \* \* \*

Bayard Delaval steadily read the story of Bayard the Knight as he kept vigil. He guessed exactly why Miss Blenkinsop would have welcomed such a history for Nadine to enthuse over! And he smiled, but then the nobleness of Bayard's character affected him—indeed he was one who had made honour famous and a splendour to be striven for—"without fear and without reproach!"

He, this modern Bayard, was perhaps without fear, but he certainly could not claim to be without reproach in the past! The simple story touched him profoundly, as all great things must touch fine souls, and it helped him to keep his vow through the hours. He could not sleep, however, nor eliminate all passionate thoughts—he could only force his will to be obeyed. Nadine turned once or twice—and he rose to see if she was waking; but no, the drug the doctor had given must have been a very strong one. Suddenly, at about two o'clock, she began to talk in her sleep—incoherent rushes of words for the most part, from which now and then a clear sentence would emerge.

"Winnie, he's my Knight Bayard, come to set me free! I know I shall love him . . . 'Eustace'—do I like the name 'Eustace'?—not much! But what's in a name, Winnie! We can call him Bayard, if we please!"

A light dawned upon Bayard Delaval. She had seen him from the window that day and evidently thought that he was Eustace! whom she must have been expecting—that had been the reason of her emotion when first he had told her his name was Bayard!

And then a wave of joy came over him and triumph.

So he had been her very first ideal! His was the image which filled her imagination before she had become engaged to her cousin! In all reasonable probability he, Bayard, was her first love!

“And I shall be her only one—so help me, God!” he swore. “If a man can hold a woman, I shall hold Nadine!”

“Bayard, I don’t want to go down the mine,” her plaintive voice went on—the little husky tone in it always making it so fascinating and un-English, however supremely refined her English pronunciation might be. And naturally never hearing any slang or slurring of words from her father or Miss Blenkinsop, Nadine’s voice was beautifully cultivated. Sadie Bronson always said to her father:

“Nadine and her dad *have* got *English accents*!!”

Bayard delighted in their low musical tones, and now Nadine’s were doubly sweet to hear, for her incoherent murmurings showed that he occupied her subconscious mind. The words came brokenly, but his alert imagination pieced them together,—and when she soon relapsed into deep sleep again he had gathered that his were the only man’s lips which had ever met hers. Eustace stood for nought in her life, and the engagement had been but an empty form.

He went back to his rocking-chair then, very happy, and soon, he too fell asleep, for he was worn out. He was awakened at four o’clock by a tap on the door. It was old Uncle Fredrick come to tell him that there had been a fight between some of the watchmen at the mine and some new-comers, and he must come at once and settle things. The old man promised to stay in the



passage and let no one enter the room until Mrs. O'Hara should bring up some fresh milk to them later in the morning, and Bayard tore off to the automobile which was waiting with the messenger, who had brought the news. Bitter disappointment was in his heart. She would probably wake soon, and he should not be there!

When he reached the mine he found things had quieted down, but it would be necessary for him to go over to Rockers Point as quickly as possible, and see the authorities there, as he found the row had been caused by some men of the gang who had come in from that place. Now, however, he could return to his bride—and perhaps he would yet be in time to watch her awakening! He would bathe and freshen himself before he should come to her though!

It grew to be nearly eight o'clock, and the two men, who had been very drunk the night before, lurched out of their room beyond the stairs, singing loudly, as they came along the passage. The walls—mere board partitions—were so thin that every sound could be heard and the uproar roused Nadine as the effects of the drug had worn off.

She opened her blue eyes drowsily without the slightest memory of anything which had occurred—nor where she was—nor what had happened to her!

Her ears took in the drunken sounds outside—and some vague feeling of intense disgust pervaded her, that was all.

She raised herself and looked at the awful room—the sun was pouring through the gaps left by the inadequate calico curtains. Her eyes travelled over each object, and came upon Bayard's heap of clothes and

his valise in the corner. It was plain to be seen that they were men's things—a silk shirt, and a grey flannel coat and trousers. Nadine pressed her forehead—what could it all mean? Where was she? A feeling of fear came over her, and she clenched her hands—and in doing so touched the hairpin wedding ring!

She peered at it with great surprise—she examined it closely. Yes, it was a hairpin certainly!

What had become of her engagement ring?

It felt as though her head was bursting, it ached so, some fleeting horror obsessed her, but she could not grasp it, nor remember what it was. She felt weak and ill, and terribly nervous.

Her shoulder did not hurt much, except when she moved it. The pain brought back the last emotions which her conscious mind had experienced before she had fainted—agonizing fear of Bayard, and the knife. She trembled all over, although she had no real memory of events.

She was all alone in this strange place. Where were her father—and Blenkie? A sense of calamity was upon her, the effects of the drug gave her a sick feeling. She struggled to think, but it was no use.

Bayard had returned half an hour ago and hearing no sound in the room had gone off to his shave and bath as he had arranged before returning to her—and he was almost ready in the general dressing shed when he heard the drunken voices in the hall, and hastened back so as to protect her if anything should happen.

Uncle Fredrick was smoking, seated on an upturned box in the passage. “She ain't woke, sonny,” he said. “There ain't a sound.”

The drunken men had reached the veranda below by this time, and Mrs. O'Hara was coming up the stairs with a tray and a jug of hot milk.

She bustled past Bayard with a knowing wink:

"Guess y'r bride will want some comfort—with you out half the night, Mr. Delaval," she said as she opened the door, and went into the room.

With his heart thumping with excitement and anticipation, and his clear-cut attractive face radiant, Bayard followed her. Nadine was sitting up in bed, huddled together as if cold, in her thin transparent silk nightgown. Her little face was wan and startled, the ivory-olive tone of her skin seemed greenish white, and even her usually rosy lips were paler. When her eyes lit on Bayard, instead of the love-light that he had expected to see dawn, a look of shrinking fear came into them! He caught his breath as if a stab went through his heart.

In her still dazed consciousness he only represented pain—and a knife to Nadine. Mrs. O'Hara put the milk down on a broken chair.

"Good morning, MRS. Delaval," she said; "s'pose you've not had too gorgeous a night—bless yu."

Wonderment came over the poor child. *Mrs. Delaval* . . . what did the woman mean? Bayard motioned to the fat good-natured creature to leave the room, which she did with a broad grin on her face, full of significance.

With joy quenched, and mouth stern and anxious, Bayard came and leaned on the rail at the foot of the bed.

"Did you hear what she said?" Nadine asked in a



trembling voice. She was every minute becoming more awake, and more aware of the horrible surroundings, which she now knew that she had seen before.

“Who—who is *Mrs. Delaval*?” Then when she realized that *a man* was looking at her, she instinctively pulled up the patchwork quilt in some confusion. Bayard felt suddenly cold and faint, his throat seemed paralysed, and it was hard to articulate.

“Nadine!—Good God! Don’t you remember our wedding yesterday—at the Justice of the Peace’s office?”

Great tears welled up in her eyes—and a blank, frightened stare grew, as though she were trying to think, then she shook her head slowly.

What—what was he talking about? Memory was returning. There was something about a snake—but a wedding . . . ?

She looked down at the hairpin ring with a puzzled frown, and then—her nerves all torn by the strain that they had been through unknowingly—gave way completely, and she screamed aloud, and afterwards fell to weeping bitterly, while words came brokenly:

“Oh, what terrible thing has happened? Oh, you cruel man—what—what have you done?”

Then fear shook her. She was beyond reasoning and her faculties were not all awake—it was just a sort of panic which was overcoming her.

“Papa—Blenkie—where are you?” and she screamed once more.

It was as if the lightning had struck Bayard. All her passionate love for him which she had showered upon him with wild abandon had just been the effect

of intoxication then! She was herself now, and she did not remember a thing.

The ghastly tragedy of it.

Indeed, indeed, what terrible action had he not committed? He a gentleman, had taken advantage of an unconscious girl, *because his own passion had clouded his apprehending faculties*. Of course he ought to have known that she was irresponsible. He had thought that the whisky had removed inhibitions and perhaps excited her, but that the real Nadine was talking and acting—not that she was intoxicated and unknowing.

“My God!” he cried in his agony. “I did not understand. I thought you knew what was happening, and consented. I—I—thought you loved me! O, God! forgive me, Nadine.”

She sobbed on, but his voice was clearing things in her brain and linking up connections.

He controlled himself, and spoke now coldly. He must repair this hideous mistake as quickly as he could, and try to act chivalrously like the knight Bayard. He did not know enough of very young girls to know that it was shock, and the dreadful room, and the loneliness which was affecting Nadine's still unbalanced mind. He thought that she was expressing her sane sentiments now, and that he must accept the inference of them without argument or an attempt to change her feelings. He was a proud man, as proud as Sir Edward in his own way, and as well as being mad with himself, he was wounded to the core. She had evidently been playing with him from the beginning it would seem.

And he had sworn to God that he would be her only love! What fools men were!

“Nothing has been done which cannot be undone, Miss Pelham,” he said sternly. “You were bitten by a rattlesnake—and we had to stay in my shack all night—and yesterday”—here his voice failed him for an instant—“your father would not accept my explanation, so—we were married on the way back.” He looked at her once more with agony in his grey eyes—his face was drawn and haggard now. As she sat there in the wretched bed all crumpled together crying, she still seemed the dearest thing the earth held for him—he had never loved her more deeply than now, when he must say farewell.

It seemed to him his duty and his honour were plain before him, and in case he should weaken, if he stayed a minute more, he turned to the door.

“I will send after your father and Miss Blenkinsop, and hope to catch them up. Meanwhile, I will see that you are protected—until you obtain your freedom. Good-bye, Miss Pelham,” and he opened the door and went out.

Nadine was hardly conscious that he was gone, nor had she taken in all the meaning of what he had said. She went on sobbing violently.

Bayard strode down the stairs, but on the veranda he staggered a little, and sat down on a bench to think.

Mrs. O'Hara saw him with the corner of her eye, as she was clearing away some breakfasts from the room within. He called to her.

“Go to Mrs. Delaval, please,” he said shortly.

But before she could answer him, he started up and



went on down the steps into the street and on towards the Sheriff's office, and was soon out of sight. A hell of pain in his heart—and anger and chagrin.

“Something's gone wrong,” the stout landlady said to herself. “I'd better go up and see what. Flappers is fools whether they're daughters of Dooks or miners—guess this one's given him the go-bye. Poor boy!”

So up the stairs she went.

Nadine was still sobbing, but everything that led up to the snake-bite was becoming clear—and the fear of the knife and Bayard was growing dimmer. It had never been concrete, only an impression of the last remembered thing, and now the consciousness of her love for him was filling her again.

She began to rack her brain to try and remember what had happened—but it was no use; her head felt like wool, and the only thing which would come was the tune of the Red Sarafane. Why should it be haunting her now?

*How* could it be that she did not remember being married? And as she thought of this, in spite of her sobs, she felt a little thrill. . . . Was she really married—married to her knight? . . .

He had been here in her room—and again the confusion of being in her nightgown overcame her, and she clutched at the quilt, taking her hands from her eyes. But he had gone away—angry. She gave a wild sob. At that moment Mrs. O'Hara opened the door.

“My—my!—this will never do,” she exclaimed, sitting down on the side of the bed.

“You's just worn out, dearie—drink the milk and that will hearten you.”

Nadine had all the English reserve and dislike of strangers' interference, but the fat creature was so kindly, and she was so very frightened and worried all by herself!—because she now realized that her family must have gone. So her first impulse to request the woman stiffly to leave her passed, and she let her pour out the milk and accepted the cup gratefully, controlling her sobs which had now become little shuddering sighs.

“He's the dandiest man in Gold Rock and the whole of Nevada, for that matter—your husband, ma'am—but girls does quarrel over trifles, and that's how trouble comes.”

Nadine did not answer, she drank the milk.

“Say,—you do love him—don't you, dearie? He's a real gentleman. The 'Prince,' we calls him in the mining camp. I'm sure he did not mean to hurt you. You'll kiss and be friends when he comes back?” Nadine nodded. The milk was comforting her. Mrs. O'Hara went on:

“Now if you'd take advice from an old desert woman, as knows men well,—you'll not let him see you peeved and draggled when he comes in. You'll get up, and look for your prettiest outfit, and you'll doll yourself up—and you'll be all ready waitin' to spring into his arms, the picture of happiness.”

A smile gradually spread over Nadine's face—and she nodded her head again. Mrs. O'Hara got off the bed—she felt as pleased as Punch that she had accomplished her mission.

“I'll tell yu what I'll do for you, dearie,” she announced with generous pride; “I'll bring you a drop of hot water to wash with—I will.”

And as Nadine began to thank her for this welcome promise, she kissed her fat fingers to her and left the room.

Then the poor little girl nestled down in the clothes again for a minute, and began stroking her hairpin wedding ring. He had given her that, and she kissed it.

And the milk having restored her a little, her real feelings began strongly to reassert themselves.

“Bayard,” she whispered softly—“I love you, I love you.”

She was not quite sure what he had been angry about, but anyhow she would smooth it all away when he came back to her. He had said he loved her—she remembered that in the canyon—and she was married to him—really married to him—and they would stay together for always. How silly she had been to cry. No wonder he was cross with her making such a scene!

What did he mean by saying nothing was done which could not be undone? But this was still too difficult for her confused mind. Only big primitive forces could take hold of it yet,—and now that fear had passed, love flooded it.

Nothing was really coherent but that she adored Bayard, and was married to him, and as that funny fat woman had said, she would make herself pretty and be quite ready to spring into his arms when he returned.

But at that moment, Bayard, seated in the Sheriff's office, was explaining matters to him—who was a friend—and the legal annulment of the marriage would be started at once.



## CHAPTER XIX

NADINE'S head began to clear when she got out of bed, and Mrs. O'Hara, true to her promise brought up a jug of hot water, and put it inside the door.

"Now that the camp's growin' I'll have bath tubs put in next winter if we can get the water," she said. "But I've seen many a boom and then drop; and it's no use in sinkin' y'r money till y'r sure, sez I! So bless yu, my dear, if you stay here with y'r husband, you may be able to have a dandy bath by Christmas!"

Nadine thanked her, and when the jolly creature had left the room, the picture of mining camp life came clearly to her. Would she really have to stay in this unspeakable place, with only a jug of hot water, daily, to wash with? Involuntarily she shuddered.

Her mind as far as the events which had occurred after she had fainted was practically an absolute blank. She knew nothing of how she had tempted Bayard in the shack, nor of all the passionate love-words she had said.

She remembered that he had told her that he loved her when the horses broke away, and she remembered that she had felt that she loved him very much in return.

After the snake had bitten her, the next clear thing was her agony of fear about the knife—then oblivion until she had awakened in this horrible room!

While she dressed, the significance of some things grew clearer to her.

How had it been possible that she had been *married*

to Bayard without knowing it? Did snake-bite take away people's reason? She could understand being in a faint and not being aware of things, but not having gone through a ceremony, speaking and acting like an ordinary person, and then not having any recollection of it. She knew nothing of having taken the whisky. Her mouth felt very hot and dry, and her head ached, but never having seen any one intoxicated, and never having heard anything about such things in her quiet stately sheltered life, she had no clue in this.

It was all a terrible mystery!

And then a dreadful feeling of sinking and depression came over her, as her reasoning power brightened, and suddenly a strange terror, for the thought struck her—*what* could have happened that her father had insisted upon the marriage.

She had some vague memory of her childhood when a schoolroom maid had got into some kind of trouble—she never knew exactly what—and had to be married off, and she was not allowed to ask questions about it—but the idea of a forced marriage had stayed in her mind ever since as some dreadful thing.

But Bayard was her knight, he could never have injured her—surely?

She knew her father was a just man though, if very stern, therefore *something* must have convinced him that it was necessary that they must be married!

Now what was it? A sickening sense of apprehension began to invade her brain. And Eustace? Had some one given him back the engagement ring? What had become of it? Who was at the wedding? And *why*

had her father and Blenkie—and she supposed Sadie and Mr. Bronson—gone off and left her alone?

It was obvious that whatever had occurred, Bayard, who had not been bitten by a snake, and was not unconscious, must have been to blame for it!

This thought was so awful, that for the moment it blotted out the memory of her love—the proud Pelham spirit grew in the ascendant, and anger trembled through her. She was not a doll, or a child, to be disposed of by two men as they thought best! She must have an explanation with Bayard—and soon!

Suspicion, and doubts, and fears held her thoughts as she tried to dress. Had Mumford been right—and was Bayard not a gentleman after all? If he had taken some advantage of her while she was unknowing of what was happening, he was simply a cad, and whether she had loved him or not she would only hate him now!

After all, what did she really know about him? Nothing, except that he was just her ideal of a man!

And here she was dressing meekly to await his return to her! Anger blazed up again—but then a thought—Return? But what had he said?

The poor child put her hand to her forehead, trying, trying to remember.

He had said—and she repeated it again—“Nothing had been done which could not be undone,” and then he had spoken of her freedom! What did that mean? Everything was a maze, and she felt as if she were going mad. How angry and white he had looked! It was very unjust of him to be angry, because how could she possibly have understood what he was talking of!



Then she felt giddy and sick, and sat down upon the broken chair. All the nerves in her poor little body were suffering from shock—she did not realize this, or know that her wretchedness was half physical. All she knew was that every one whom she had believed in, seemed to have failed and deserted her. Her father and Blenkie had left her alone with this man who was not well known to any one of them, except Mr. Bronson. Yes, Mr. Bronson knew him well, and respected and trusted him! That was something!

She tried to get up again and go on with her dressing. She searched about to see what had become of her dressing-case fittings; then she saw the case and opened it, and found them all put back. Who had done this? Her book, *The Story of Bayard*, lay on the table. Who had put it there? She began to walk up and down the room. Had Bayard stayed there all night? or was it perhaps nights and nights? No, he had said they were married yesterday. Then her innate modesty became affronted. He had seen her in her nightgown—it was all perfectly dreadful! She asked herself over and over again could not she remember *something*?

But nothing would come.

She would go over all the bare facts once more since they left the mine, and she faced them one by one. She had been bitten by a snake and swooned. Then she had awakened all alone in the Gold Rock shanty hotel, finding, instead of her engagement ring, a twisted bit of wire round her left third finger!

Bayard had then come in with the landlady who had called her “Mrs. Delaval!”

He then told her that she stayed alone with him in

the shack, after she was bitten, and that her father coming there would accept no explanation from him, Bayard, but insisted upon his marrying her at once!

\* \* \* \* \*

The ugly impression of the schoolroom maid mystery came to her, and her cheeks flamed. She was going through the most awful moments which had ever come to her in her eighteen and a half years of life!

Any girl finding herself in such a situation in a strange wild country among people whom she did not know, would have been greatly disturbed, even if she knew the world and its ways; but to an absolutely innocent and ignorant creature like little Nadine, who had been sheltered and protected from her birth, it was all a terror.

What should she do?—run away? but where to?

Panic was seizing her. An unreasoning fear of Bayard—fear of everything. But her courage came back soon, and she clenched her strong white teeth fiercely, and made herself finish her dressing. Then she began walking up and down the room—the racking uncertainty was almost unbearable.

“The Pelhams were never cowards!” she said to herself firmly, “and I must not be.”

Half an hour passed in this cruel way, then as she paced the floor she noticed again Bayard’s bag and valise, and his clothes lying in a heap in the corner. They seemed to have been what her eyes had first lighted on when she had awakened. She went over to them now, and stared at them. She remembered that silk shirt—it was the one he had worn at the mine—

and look!—there was some blood on the sleeve—her blood! She picked the shirt up—and then a strange thing happened! The feel of it brought Bayard, her beloved, back to her, it connected some tender chord in her subconsciousness! A new and passionate wave of emotion came over her for him. What if he *had* some explanation to make?

But if he had or he had not, she could not help loving him! She was trembling all over now!

She rushed to the distorted mirror. No! she was not looking pretty! She was so pale! She had some scent in one of her gold-topped bottles. She would rub her cheeks and lips with that, to try and bring some colour into them! Why had Augustine put in only this striped jersey frock? It was not very becoming. Oh, would he never come?

She set about tidying the room, and she folded Bayard's clothes as neatly as she could, and put them on top of the valise. And her heart began to beat very fast with excitement. What would they say to one another—when he did come? And if he *had* some explanation to offer?—and—and—she *did* stay with him—and he was her husband . . . what would it be like? Confusion filled her—a strange weird fluttering feeling in her heart. And with her cheeks glowing now, she clasped her little hands. Footsteps were coming up the stairs. They were heavy footsteps though—Bayard must be still very angry. There was a knock at the door.

She went to it and opened it.

A strange man stood there with a big envelope in his hand.



“ Are you Mrs. Bayard Delaval, ma’am? ” he said, eyeing her curiously.

Nadine felt her voice strangle, she was so excited, so she nodded a little consciously, and the man handed her the ominous-looking letter.

She opened it. It was a legal document bearing the Sheriff’s stamp. She made out that it had something to do with an application for the annulment of marriage between Bayard Delaval and Nadine Pelham, with a lot of legal terms attached.

“ Mr. Delaval asked me to show you where to sign, ma’am—I’m to act for you,” the man said. And then by way of comforting her, he added: “ It’ll only take a short time before you’s free! ”

The blood all left Nadine’s face—the shock was so great, and then all the pride in her nature came to her rescue, and she raised her little childish curly head with the air of an empress, and looked at the man straight in the eyes.

“ Very well,” she said, and walked to the table.

He gave her his stylo pen, and she signed firmly in bold characters, for the first and last time, “ Nadine Delaval; ” then quite calmly she handed the paper to the man, who was evidently to be her attorney, and thanking her, and saying he would communicate with her later, he left her alone.

But when he had gone, a pathetic little figure staggered to the bed and flung itself down.

It was not whether Bayard had an explanation or not to offer, or whether he was guilty of some offence against her, or he was not. Fate had stepped in and parted them. He, Bayard, had set her free! And now

she knew that she loved him, good or bad, guilty or not guilty, better than anything else in the world!

She was too unspeakably wretched for tears, but she covered her face with her hands, and in doing so the hairpin wedding ring scratched her.

For some unknown reason, connecting far back with the gipsy instincts again, this little circumstance angered her, and in a sudden gust of temper she pulled it off, and with a mocking hollow laugh she twisted it straight, and into a hairpin again—and jumping up went to the mirror and put it into her hair.

She felt that she hated all men in the world. Bitterness alone filled her heart at the sorry ending to her love dream!

No one would have recognized the face which looked back at her as the little Nadine's—the eyes were those of a hard cynical woman.

As she turned away, there was another knock at the door.

It was “Uncle Fredrick”—whom she did not remember seeing before. He brought a note, and said he would call again with the motor to take her to Gold Stamp at one o'clock, but he asked now for Mr. Delaval's things.

Nadine pointed to the heap in the corner, and she controlled herself until the old man had left the room with them, then she tore open the envelope feverishly.

The letter was written upon the Sheriff's paper. The writing was strong and firm, and rather English looking, not large and American like Sadie's and Mr. Bronson's, which she had chanced to have seen.

For a minute she held her breath, and a mist seemed to be rising before her eyes. Then she looked at the date.

GOLD ROCK,

*June 30, 1920.*

“DEAR MISS PELHAM” (it began),—

“I have arranged that the ghastly mistake shall be righted as soon as possible. The Justice of the Peace who married us is a friend of mine, so that will simplify the annulment proceedings, and you will be free in a very short time. I have wired to Miss Blenkinsop at Gold Stamp, and I calculate that it will reach her before the party can have left in the private car. I have asked her to remain and meet you—and I have arranged that the old man who brings this, Fredrick Binwood, will accompany you back to Gold Stamp this afternoon. I am called away immediately to Rockers Point, where disturbances are taking place. Mr. Arlsen, who brought the preliminary application paper for you to sign, will represent you, and send all communications to the Gold Stamp Palace Hotel.

“I can only wish you all happiness in your future life, and express my sincerest regrets for having unwittingly caused you trouble in our short acquaintance.

“Yours truly,

“BAYARD DELAVAL.”

Nadine became icy cold as she read the last words.

She felt as if death was clutching at her heart.

Then she sank on to the bed in passionate weeping.

“O God!” she cried piteously—“now I know what the snake dream meant!”



## CHAPTER XX

WHEN Bayard had set the easy western law in motion he rushed to find Uncle Fredrick. He explained very briefly the truth to him, that Nadine had been unconscious at the wedding, and asked him to keep guard over her until he delivered her to her own people at Gold Stamp.

The old man, whose wits were sharp over the ways of humanity, grasped the situation. "It all seemed to me queer-like boy," he said, "as I sat beside her—seemed as it couldn't have been natural for her to have been married, and then dead asleep like that. You're best out of it. Them English aren't the same as us—they have their prejudices, and their pomps and ceremonies. If you want the girl—court her proper like, in a city—not out here in the rough."

"You are perfectly right, Uncle. I was crazy."

"My advice to you is—get clear off now to your work at Rockers Point, Bayard Delaval. Nasty things happening there—and you'll have enough to do of man's work to keep you from woman-grievin'—and then when you know she's legally free, and has had time to think over things and miss you—go right after her and get her proper! But don't you stay now—you couldn't start with her on a fair plane even if yu made it up—there'd be ugly recollections between yu!"

Bayard nodded his head—this was good advice as far as getting off at once went. The eventuality should not concern him! He was through with weakness and

women! How had he ever been mad enough to think of that dainty exquisite bit of Dresden china out here in the wilds! He had simply been intoxicated with emotion and lost his sane point of view. There was no time, however, for him to brood, for duty fortunately compelled him to start for Rockers Point immediately, now that the arrangements for Nadine's protection were completed. That minute a wire had been put into his hand from Blenkie. His had caught her actually as she was getting into the train, and of course she had remained behind, and would await Nadine's arrival that evening at the Gold Stamp Palace Hotel. Mrs. O'Hara had been instructed to go up with some light dinner at one o'clock, and Uncle Fredrick had a motor waiting to conduct "Miss Pelham" across the mountain and desert, immediately after.

So all was done and all was said, and now it simply behoved Bayard to be a man and get on with the work—grim enough—which lay in front of him.

So much for romance!

If he had been an Englishman, the slightly quixotic attitude that he had taken up would have struck him as perhaps a little dramatic, when later cold hours of reflection came; but above every other quality, American men are chivalrous to women often to the point of being pusillanimous, and putting up with things, and caprices and unreasonableness from them that no other nation would tolerate for a minute. Bayard was a masterful man, and accustomed to ruling, and would certainly rule the individual woman who should become his own, but the national point of view had naturally affected his attitude of mind on the subject of their treatment in

general. It seemed to him then the course he had taken was the only one a gentleman could take, and he did not use his habitual method of psychological deduction to probe his motives, or he would have discovered that the gall to his pride was so great that it did not permit him to reason clearly. Now as he entered the car with a face set like iron, no thoughts of any future meeting with Nadine were in his mind. He had done with the episode in his life, and would give his whole force to his work ahead—which was heavy enough to keep him busy.

Uncle Fredrick stood by the car and he gave him last instructions.

“Put y’r gun in y’r belt, sonny,” the old man said. “Let them see y’r armed this time and mean business!”

Bayard, to please him, took the revolver from his pocket and slipped it in his belt, western fashion.

Then at the last minute he looked up at the window in the passage, which led to Nadine’s room. Not with any hope of seeing her, because her windows looked out the other way, but with some uncontrollable sentiment. He started the motor, and as he did so, for a second he caught sight of a little white face peeping suddenly from the window of the passage. He was going so fast he was hardly even sure that it was she, but instinct made him raise his cap, and there was a sardonic smile on his stern lips; then he drove like hell down the track into the wilds.

Nadine had lain on her bed for some while sobbing. In her weak state it was difficult to regain her poise. She had heard one or two motors come and go, and with each noise she had wondered if it might be Bayard.



At last she made herself rise and pack her few things, and put on her coat and hat. Finally, desire to go out in the passage and see what was happening seized her. Her memory of the place and their arrival there from Gold Stamp was now clear. She recollected a window which gave on to the veranda just as her own room at home gave a clear view of the west entrance. She went to it cautiously and peeped from behind the ragged curtain. It was just at the moment when Bayard put the revolver in his belt. It was Bayard—her lover—her husband! He was going away! Then in a flash the motor passed, and she saw the hard cynical smile on his beloved face as he removed his cap. He had seen her! And again that feeling of death came over her, so that she had to clutch at the window frame or she would have fallen.

She had seen him from a window for the first time—her knight Bayard! And now it was from a window that she had seen him go—go where? . . . Away out of her life—into danger!—there was a pistol in his belt! and how he must hate her to have looked at her like that! It was all cruel and unjust, and he must be a brute after all, and she would go back to Blenkie and forget him!

So at last the time came for her dinner and Mrs. O'Hara brought up a basin of broth, and a cup of coffee, and some little scones that she had made.

The kind woman believed in creature comforts. She knew nothing of a parting between the pair, and thought that her former good offices had patched things up. It was Bayard's having to go to Rockers Point into probable danger which she believed was now the cause of Nadine's depression. So she strove to hearten her.

“ Sure, Mr. Delaval can shoot straight, ma’am,” she said, “ and knows how to defend himself, and I always sez them things is fate, and there is no use in worryin’. He’ll be all right and back with you at Gold Stamp in that gorgeous hotel in no time. You must cheer up and be ready for him to have a fine honeymoon.”

Nadine tried to smile; she felt that she would quite break down if she attempted to talk. So while Mrs. O’Hara poured out the coffee she had to listen to a string of Bayard’s perfections. How he was loved and respected—and how all the girls were crazy for him. “ And there ain’t none around he’s so much as given the chance to! You are sure lucky, ma’am!”

Nadine felt as though the food would choke her, but swallowed what she could; she had never spoken, only nodded her head. Then finally Mrs. O’Hara left her, and not long after Uncle Fredrick came up to say the car was there.

Nadine got away at last, thanking Mrs. O’Hara for all her kindness, and the jolly creature waving her an adieu!

“ We’ll see you back again soon, dearie,” were her last words.

Uncle Fredrick sat by the driver and spoke never a word, but he had taken Nadine’s measure.

She was a sweet hothouse flower, he decided, but you could not transplant them into the desert.

And in Nadine’s heart there was wild rebellion against fate. Here she was going back to be caged once more!

No!—that she would never endure! She had heard much of the freedom of American women from Sadie.

She would make her own life. She knew nothing of her father having denied that he had now a daughter, and expected that Blenkie would have instructions to take her back to England to him.

She would not go! Whom beside Sadie did she know in America? Sadie would probably be prejudiced. . . . Lady Crombie, of course! who had always been such a kind friend! As soon as the legal formalities were over, and she could leave Nevada, she would go to Lady Crombie at Washington. She would write at once when she got to Gold Stamp, and tell her of the injustice of every one concerned. Underneath there was the passionate ache for Bayard, suppressed by her hurt feelings, which encouraged the doubts and fears of what his conduct had been in the shack—would she ever know what had happened?

The ride seemed a nightmare to her—the heavy black clouds which had gathered in the sky seemed in tune with her thoughts. And there in the hall of the hotel her old governess awaited her!



## CHAPTER XXI

NOTHING of interest occurred during Nadine's wait in Gold Stamp—except the hardening of her character.

She learned from Blenkie that her father had cast her off! She burnt with indignation. What had she done?

When Miss Blenkinsop became aware that Nadine had been totally unconscious of everything which had occurred, the whole sympathy of the hard woman went out to her. Blenkie believed in justice, but at the same time a fierce resentment arose in her breast against Mr. Delaval. She had no high opinion of men in the abstract, and you never could tell how foreigners would act! But at least he had done the only decent thing he could under the circumstances, in obtaining the annulment.

Blenkie's insidious contempt of the young American had its effect in keeping up Nadine's anger against him. She had moments when the gipsy part of her nature could have killed him—and then when she was alone at night she would lie and shake with dry sobs, because she knew that she loved him more than ever!

No news came to them about him except that there had been an awful row at Rockers Point (account in the local paper) and that free fighting had occurred, quelled by the cool courage of the head mining engineer of the Gold Stamp Mining Corporation—Bayard Delaval. Nadine read the lines eagerly. There were

long eulogies upon Bayard. He was dear to every miner in the country, and the reporters just "ate up" any trifle about him. How he had managed to keep the spicy tit-bit of his marriage and the annulment of it out of the papers, only his friends the Sheriff and the Justice of the Peace knew!

Nadine kept to her room during most of her stay—and indeed was in bed for a whole week recovering on her arrival.

Sir Edward had gone straight to Canada instead of stopping at Washington. He was too much upset even to see his old friends. Lady Crombie wrote that she would be delighted to receive Nadine, and she deplored the tragic events which had taken place. Nadine had told her nothing when she wrote, but that she had been married by mistake! So we will leave all this dull part of the poor girl's life in the mist where she would wish it to be, and only go on with her story when it becomes interesting again.

But when she left Nevada a great change had occurred in her—Blenkie thought not for the better. She was much oftener sullen. She would not stand the least authority being exercised over her. She was bitter, and raged at fate, and her beliefs seemed to have been destroyed—and no wonder!

Bayard had been too occupied for a while to feel, but when things quieted down, and he was able to return, to Gold Rock a new aspect of the affair struck him, and the first time he went out to his shack again the pain was unbearable.

He sat down in the chair by the writing-table and reconstructed in his mind the whole scene. Of course

he ought to have known that she was intoxicated! Then the blood began to run in his veins as the picture of how she had looked with the light of passion in her blue eyes came back to him. For good or for ill he loved her more than ever. Life seemed a sickening blank ahead of him without her!

He avoided hearing news of her, though his friend Hickory Cannon came out to Gold Rock and could have told him that he had seen her at the Palace Hotel.

Because of the annulment having been applied for immediately after the marriage, made the case not ordinary, and the decision was given at once, and by the end of July they were free.

Then a temptation came to Bayard. Should he go after her wherever she had gone, and follow old Uncle Fredrick's advice? But his work would not let him leave the mine then, so he stayed and chafed, and he too cursed fate for what it had brought him.

When Nadine arrived at the Crombies' house in Washington, Lady Crombie was aghast at the change in her. A sullen resentful look lay always deep in the blue eyes, her timid gentle manner had altered into one of more assurance. The gipsy half had begun to show.

Sir Edward had refused to hear any discussion about her. He had provided her with ample money, and told the Crombies he did not wish to hear her name when he thanked them for receiving her. But when Lady Crombie had a full talk with Miss Blenkinsop the night she and Nadine arrived, she said to her husband, when they were alone, that Sir Edward ought to know the truth.

"It appears that Nadine was totally unconscious



of the entire affair until she woke up the day after she was married! So how could anything be her fault, poor child!"

"The man is a scoundrel then to have taken advantage of her," Lord Crombie remarked laconically, "and it is a good thing it is all over, and that there has not been a great scandal about it."

"Yes, but," Lady Crombie protested, "that does not remove the injustice to Nadine in her father's behaviour to her. I must write him a long letter."

Lord Crombie fixed his glass in his eye and shook his head.

"Wait a week or two and see how things are going, then we can tell Ned just what we think of her."

Lady Crombie agreed.

"Miss Blenkinsop is returning to England now that she can safely leave her charge with us. She is a good soul and in her cold way loves the child." Then after a pause: "I wonder if Eustace having married her friend Miss Bronson last week will annoy Nadine? They are coming here in a fortnight, you know!"

"I don't suppose she will care in the least, she never seemed keen upon the fellow. Ned was wrong to have thought of such a marriage!"

"Everything seems to be difficult for that poor little girl. Now I want her to be happy and forget; we must see how we can amuse her, dear."

It was the wrong time of the year and most people were absent, but a jolly younger set whose parents or husbands were in the Government, and could not get away.

It was the first time a feeling of joy had come to

Nadine, since her sad adventure, when the second evening after she had arrived, Lady Crombie took her to a dance at one of the country clubs. Her first day had been spent in buying as many new clothes as she could! and arrayed in one of them, a frock of scarlet tulle, she looked the most exotic and exquisite flower.

Quite close to this club a fabulously rich millionaire had just finished enlarging a perfect palace for himself, bought from an impoverished southern family. Mr. Howard B. Hopper intended to become a grand seigneur in every way! As soon as Nadine came into the room with Lady Crombie, the distinguished diplomatist's wife, who was in America on the special mission, Mr. Hopper experienced a thrill!

Here was the very girl who had attracted him on the ship, and whom his friend Terry Potter had made such a lamentable failure over getting an introduction to!

Here was luck! He lost no time in being introduced.

To Nadine he appeared a rather common man, with a very jolly manner, and his bold admiration was not displeasing to her. It gave her a sense of her own loveliness and importance after the life, practically in hiding, she had been living at Gold Stamp.

"You just *are*," Mr. Hopper told her, as she danced with him.

He danced wonderfully well, and Nadine enjoyed it. Lights and music always affected the gipsy part of her temperament, and to a connoisseur of women like Howard B. Hopper, that passionate magnetic something in her was fully appreciated. Bayard would have felt it was a desecration for such a person even to touch her!

“I nearly went crazy on the ship because I could not get an introduction to you,” Mr. Hopper told her as they went round. “But fate did not mean you to slip away! And now I’m not going to let any grass grow, Miss Pelham!”

“Were you on the ship?” Nadine exclaimed in real surprise. She had never remarked him! This piqued him greatly and added to the zest of his chase.

“Sure. I had the next table to you in the restaurant. You certainly had your back to me, but I never took my eyes off that!”

Nadine laughed; she wondered if her father had noticed him.

“You must come to my place. I have a little home round the corner that I’d love to show you. I went to Europe this spring to choose pictures for it, but the prettiest picture I saw I did not catch sight of until I was crossing the gangway at Southampton!”

The rest of the dance continued with remarks of the same kind, each one becoming more bold in its expression of admiration!

Nadine had never had any one to admire her, except Bayard, and she had the accessible vanity of primitive natures. And with all her training, probably Mr. Hopper did not appear as impossibly vulgar to her as he would have to a pure-bred English woman. The gipsy half of her responded to the obviousness of his flattery. Many other men were introduced to her—“charming boys,” the hostess called them. This amused Nadine. Why were all males in America called “boys”? But she liked them extremely. They were all so gay and irresponsible. She danced the entire time,



and Mr. Hopper took care that he came in for his share of favour!

Of course it had been whispered round that Nadine had been the heroine of some wild story out west! But no one knew exactly what it was—only it added to the interest felt in her.

To avoid the dull and the ordinary, and to get as near the eccentric as possible, was the aim of this younger set of society.

Lady Crombie had not known what the party was going to be like, and had taken Nadine there on the invitation of a friend belonging to the diplomatic corps.

She saw in a moment that this was not the circle she would have wished Nadine to consort with; but it was too late now, as she could see that they delighted her.

“I have so enjoyed myself, dear Lady Crombie,” Nadine told her as they said good-night. “I know I shall love this place and these delightful people!” And her little face was like a radiant flower. “They seem to have planned lovely things for me to do for days ahead—it is all divine!”

Lady Crombie was too wise to say anything then, but she felt annoyed with herself; it was a pity to have given Nadine a taste for the wrong sort of companions.

And as the days went on they seemed to surround her and draw her into their vortex.

She was out morning, noon, and night. For a week the newness of everything, and the gratification of her longing for fun and life, seemed happiness; but with all her primitiveness Nadine was not really a frivolous being, and there grew again the ache of unsatisfaction. She bravely tried to banish all thoughts of Bayard when-

ever they came to her, but she was not always successful, and there were moments when a wild feeling swamped her, and made her feel that she must break away and go and find him.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hopper had made up his mind.

Miss Nadine Pelham, daughter of Sir Edward Pelham, Baronet, of Somersetshire, England, should be *his* wife! That there had been some scandal out west did not matter to him! Every one had scandals about them nowadays! He did not prize the modest violet—he would prefer what he intended to possess to be something who would attract interest and attention!

At all the parties which Nadine attended—the rides and the picnics—Howard B. Hopper managed to be in her train, although he seldom got a chance to be alone with her. He sent her flowers and candies—and there was no doubt of his great admiration. Lady Crombie had given Nadine a little sitting-room for herself leading out of her bedroom, and it was generally full of Mr. Hopper's American beauty roses. A sort of riotous spirit seemed to be developing in the girl, and Lady Crombie felt greatly distressed.

Lord Crombie was studying their little guest with his wise old eyes.

“She is really very unhappy, Viola,” he said to his wife. “Do you suppose she cared deeply for that fellow out at the mine? I wish you could get the truth out of her, and perhaps we could help in some way. The whole thing is a great mystery. If you remember, old Ned merely said this marriage took place as the suite of a kind of riding picnic to the mine—and he was too angry to talk about it. Then Nadine writes that she has been

married by mistake—and the affair is to be annulled immediately; and Miss Blenkinsop tells you that she was bitten by a rattlesnake, and was completely unconscious from the effects of the whisky she had to take, and knew nothing about it! 'Pon my soul, the whole thing is as incredible as a penny novelette! What is the truth of it all?"

"Yes, I wish I knew. Since it was my fault originally for taking her to the Buskins' party, it will be very hard to prevent her now from sticking to that clan, and they are certainly not the friends Ned would approve of for her," and Lady Crombie sighed.

"The mother was the most difficult problem, and the daughter looks like following in her footsteps! Eustace and his bride will be here next week, and perhaps they will be able to throw some light upon the subject," Lord Crombie said. But Lady Crombie only sighed again.



## CHAPTER XXII

**E**VENTS in most people's lives move with great rapidity for long or short periods, and then there comes a time of stagnation when nothing seems to be happening.

That August of 1920 was absolutely dead to Bayard Delaval. The mine was booming, he was rapidly growing very rich, but his life went on from day to day, exactly in the same groove.

It was terribly hot and arid, he had no one of his own sort to speak to, and beyond the kindly miners there was no one at all! The few officials' wives in Gold Stamp whom he knew, had all left for the sea, or a cooler place. He had not spoken to a woman since the Pelhams and Bronsons left; unless one excepted Mrs. O'Hara! and fearing that she would talk to him of Nadine he had gone as rarely as he could to the hotel, and always in company. But one day about the middle of the month she happened to come and take the vacant rocking-chair next to him on the veranda, when business took him to the hotel to wait for a man.

"Yu'r a stranger, Mr. Delaval!" she told him. "Guess yu've no pleasant memories of this place!" Bayard stiffened. But she went on unabashed: "It's yu'as made the mess of things—now don't get angry, boy!"—for Bayard had made an exclamation of protest—"if yu'd seen her cryin' when I got up to her—yu'd have known she wasn't all there—knowin' what

you knew, and what I didn't know then. Then when she woke up really she admitted to me that she loved you, and dressed herself up for you—waitin' for you to come to spring into your arms! And you—just sendin' Mr. Arlsen!" Bayard started to his feet with the shock of this and then sat down again. "Oh! I've heard all about the whole thing from 'Uncle Fredrick'—I don't talk as you know—but now's the time to talk to you—well, yu just knocked her out, yu did—she no more than a baby! Why she never let on when I went with her dinner that yu'd parted—only her heart was breakin'—I could see that, and thought it was yu going into danger as was doin' it. My! Yu've somethin' to answer, Bayard Delaval! I tell you!"

The thrust went home! Bayard was deeply moved and startled by what she had said—Nadine had admitted that she loved him! There was no use in being offended with Mrs. O'Hara, she was a character, and every miner in Nevada knew her, and respected her for her golden heart, and trenchant tongue; she told man's truth, and never beat about the bush, or stung like a female. Bayard wanted to hear the truth, which perhaps she could tell him. He owned this at last to himself. He knew already that it was partly his own wounded vanity which had made him act in what he now began to feel was an over-heroic way. So he relaxed the hostile attitude he had adopted towards the kindly landlady, and bent forward eagerly. Was it true that Nadine loved him? His heart beat.

"Please tell me everything, Mrs. O'Hara; I feel that you are a friend," he said anxiously. Had he made

a still more ghastly mistake than his supposed previous one?

Mrs. O'Hara rocked her chair for a second, then:

“ Well, it's this way—I've heard bits from one and another: Sheriff—Doc. Heathcott—Uncle Fredrick—and I've seen what I've seen—so I sez to myself ‘ Molly O'Hara, what you thought at the time don't match with what you hear now! ’ So I just pieced all together and I've got it clear. Doc. Heathcott says with the amount of whisky which yu told him yu gave the little daisy to kill the bite, she must have been dead gone, even though when it's counteractin' a poison it don't show as a drunk, and she could have knowed nothing for hours and hours. She hadn't begun to know when Doc. came—and then he said he gave her a dope as strong as he knew. What happened between yu and her I don't presume to guess, sir, but I heard her scream when I was in the passage, and I had seen that she was struck surprised when I'd called her Mrs. Delaval! and when I got up to her again, she was cryin' her eyes out, hysteric like, so I sez to her ‘ You do love him, don't you, dearie? ’ and she nodded her pretty head and smiled through them big tears, enough to touch the heart of a stone—she looked as pretty as a picture! And then the poor child, that could hardly stand on her feet, got up, and dolled herself up, and waited for you—and you just sent an attorney! Oh! I could have killed you, Mr. Delaval—when I knew it all! and when I saw her after yu'd gone she was as white as a lily, and only her pride kep' her up. And yu, a great strong man, gettin' angry with what a baby said when it was only half-sensible!



Seems to me men is more fools than flappers—and brutes too!”

Bayard covered his face with his hands. Light had come to him, and with it an agony of remorse and shame of himself!

Mrs. O'Hara rubbed it in.

“It was her screamin' after I'd called her 'Mrs. Delaval,' I 'spose, that angered yu! Why it was natural, seein' she couldn't have known she was married to yu, by what Doc. says. You don't know girls—and she's only a kiddie, even if she's the daughter of the Dooks of England—poor little honey! Why, of course she screamed! Put y'rself in her place—see what she'd remember naturally, and see what she woke up to! Why, I'd ha' screamed myself!”

Bayard wrung his hands in his anguish. But Mrs. O'Hara was speaking again, while she swung backwards and forwards slowly.

“It's the vanity of men! what *they* want, what *they* are—if some one has hurt *their* pride—never the poor little weak girlies! Oh! they get my goat! And that one just a bit of a baby, as simple as a flower and snuggled round all her life with folks, and teacher, and servants most likely. Why, you just took her and broke her heart, Mr. Delaval, on y'r own pride!”

“Oh! My God!” said Bayard brokenly.

“There's no use in me paintin' up things for you. You acted like a fool, sonnie! I know them English gentry—we've had 'em here among the miners—fine as muslin in their feelin's, and proud as kings—and none of the horse-sense we've got. Yu couldn't ha' put over no stunts like you did, on the other peach—

Miss Bronson—but yu just broke up the orchard—you did!”

What Bayard was feeling could not be put into words. Suddenly the whole blank truth had come to him—and a madness of grief, a fury at his own blindness and vanity scourged him.

The poor little darling girl—ill and suffering—and because *he* was hurt in his pride, he had failed almost in humanity!

He started from his seat and strode down in to the open space in front of the hotel. He felt as though he must go out and smash something!

Mrs. O'Hara looked after him with her wise kind eyes.

“It'ul do him good,” she said to herself. “Men is darned set on themselves—the dears!” and she smiled benevolently.

Bayard could hardly control himself, the remorse he was suffering was so great. He could see the pathetic lithe body of his darling little sweetheart, as he took her back to the hotel, after the wedding ceremony—he could see her white small face, and tiny helpless hand when he put the wire hairpin ring on it!

How was it possible that he had been such an infernal brute—and fool! Of course she screamed, if the last thing she could remember was his cutting her shoulder with the knife.

It was the natural reaction, and he who had made a study of psychology ever since he left Harvard, had not had enough sense to apply it in his own case! He cursed himself!

The whole thing was perfectly plain. In her half-

unawakened state—he had but suggested terror of the knife! The real Nadine had been the one who had pressed her lips to his in the shack!

The bitterness of his self-reproach brought scorching tears to his grey eyes, as he strode there through the gap of the tents opposite the hotel, into the desert of sand and scrub.

And now—where was she? Was her father still in the state of anger and contempt which he had been in, when he left? Who was protecting her and caring for her? And he, Bayard Delaval—ridiculous self-important hypocrite!—imagining he was behaving as the Knight Bayard because HIS VANITY was wounded—had let this innocent child go out into the world with the echo of some scandal overshadowing her—with the scorn of her father—with a wound in her heart—with her beliefs broken—as they must be—and all because *he*—a grown man—had taken umbrage at her semi-conscious want of response to *himself*!

There are a number of swear words in the American vocabulary, and Bayard Delaval levelled them all *at himself*.

How was it possible that a man could have been such a cursed imbecile—to call it by no worse name!

And now—was it too late? Could he repair the hideous mistake? How? When and where?

Mr. Bronson had written several times to him stiffly in purely business fashion; but if he went to him, and explained the whole thing, surely he would help him, Bayard, to get in touch with the Pelhams again? But perhaps this brutal and shameful conduct had killed all Nadine's love for him? Perhaps it was all too late?



He would force himself to go through the penance of thinking out the whole thing from A to Z. He would settle his affairs at the mine, and he would then go in search of Nadine—and lay his infinite shame and repentance at her feet.

But man proposes—and God (or is it woman?) disposes!

In any case—a complication at the mine kept Bayard Delaval bound to the wheel of his work for two more weeks, because so many lives depended upon him, and during this time events were moving rapidly towards culmination in the fate of Nadine!

## CHAPTER XXIII

MR. HOWARD B. HOPPER was not a man who hesitated in his actions. *He*, himself, was the only thing he lived for—and some subconscious sense prompted him to look after his own interests. What he proposed to do now was to dazzle the lovely little English peach with a demonstration of the extent of his wealth, and his devotion to her.

So he decided he would give a fête in her honour which should show her that she would be taking on a man capable of the most lavish expansion. There was just one drawback to his happiness—there was Polly!

Polly had her head screwed on. Alas, she not only loved him—of course . . . but took a keen interest in his cheque-book as well. Sometimes the one and sometimes the other sentiment came uppermost in her. She lived in the street those ladies resided in—with their *ultra* respectable mothers—or aunts. Howard B. Hopper was not *mean*—even if he were not heedlessly generous. Polly had a “home” any young woman might be proud of—and a Pierce-Arrow car which she drove herself. She had everything she could want in the way of clothes too, and had just bought herself a new set of some outlandish cat fur, for the early autumn! Polly knew—and loved—and despised—Howard B. Hopper.

“Poppa,” she called him, because he was getting just the least bit bald. Polly began to hear of Mr. Hopper’s attention to the beautiful English girl, who was staying with some one on the British Mission.

Polly resented this. There was only *one* way of soothing her wounded feelings—and the sum must be large!

Mr. Hopper had an office in Washington City, where he seldom went—since business was no longer a real necessity to him. It was merely to telephone and give his orders that he ever entered the gorgeously fitted suite. It was convenient to have an office though, he felt.

Polly knew it very well.

The report of the intended fête was in the papers of course. To spend the thousands of dollars Howard B. Hopper intended to spend on a party, would be absolutely useless unless every paper in America chronicled the fact!

He was going to have the gardens of his reorganized palace lit too marvelously! He was going to have an old galley constructed to float on his miniature lake, where the guests could have supper—if they wanted to be *en bande*! Those who preferred a *tête-à-tête* could go in canoes, with a wonderfully arranged table put across each, with exquisitely subtle sandwiches and fruit, and plenty of champagne for two.

Black swans would swim about, and white swans would draw miniature gondolas laden with cigarettes, and ether candies, and other sorts of dope!

Nothing should be wanting which Nero might have ordered for one of his exotic nights!

Russian dancers, with their own orchestra, were to come from New York, and dance in the tropical late August atmosphere, in white fur-trimmed garments, and then finish in a fall of imitation snow! The lake was but a pond in daylight—a large artificial pond, but



by night it could be made to have a vast and gorgeous allure, as of Arabian night mystery—or a magician's sea!

“Neptune” (the best swimmer from Newport) should disport himself upon a rock, constructed in the middle of this ocean, and three of the champion swimmers of America should entertain the guests as mermaids!

What more could the love of man offer to the modern maiden!!! Nadine heard of this wonder being prepared for her the day before Mr. Howard B. Hopper actually broached her upon the subject! And the insidious flattery of the broadcast magnificence of it went to her head! Here was some one willing to spend fabulous sums upon her pleasure—as a proof of his devotion. Some one who thought her perfect! Who was in sympathy with all those instincts in her being which expressed the things which that Pelham spirit, exemplified by her father, disapproved of. The warmest appreciation grew in her for this blatant admirer.

Nadine was quite unaccustomed to champagne—or late hours—or flattery, and the insidious combination of the three, encompassing her each day in succession, was gradually having an effect upon that part of her nature which was primitive and gipsy.

She was glorying in her conquest of the richest millionaire of the set of irresponsible young people, whom she had fraternized with.

They were all talking about the wonderful fête, and Howard B. Hopper was letting her know every moment that it was being given FOR HER!

Lady Crombie had written to Sir Edward Pelham—

a plain statement of facts as far as she knew them. Whatever anger he could feel towards Mr. Delaval, it was perfectly ridiculously unjust to hold *any* resentment or impute any blame to Nadine! One might just as well accuse a Nun of using swear words when unconscious with gas while having a tooth drawn, as to accuse Nadine of light conduct when she was completely intoxicated from the quantity of whisky she had been forced to take, to prevent her from dying of rattlesnake bite! So Lady Crombie put it to the irate parent, and because he was a gentleman, and an honest man, he instantly recognized the justice of her argument, and asked himself what he had better do about the whole thing? And then he began to think seriously—his mind awakened on one point, aided his true appreciation of others. What if—because she must have been completely tipsy—Nadine had acted as Nada used to act when completely sober, but in an excited mood. How had he—a sane Englishman contained himself in Petersburg in those old days? He had gone against every instinct of his family training, his family tradition, for hundreds of years, and given his honour and his *name*, the sacred name of Pelham, into the keeping of a wild Russian gipsy. What in heaven's name had given him the right to be so censorious about the young American—who for all he knew positively, and for all he felt probably, had been tempted in the same way.

He remembered Nadine's face which he had seen when she was dancing with Bayard—looking up at the young man with every expression of voluptuous passion. . . . No, he had been unjust, now he could see that quite plainly. But the affair was finished—the young

man had behaved absolutely as a gentleman should. The moment he had realized that Nadine had been unconscious, he had set the lenient Western Law in motion, and obtained an annulment of the marriage. But perhaps he had truly loved Nadine? Sir Edward remembered how boldly he had stood straight up and answered in the shack, and how eagerly he had desired to be the girl's husband.

It was not for her fortune. Sir Edward knew quite well that Bayard Delaval owned a share in the mine, and must soon be a very rich man. No, he must have *loved* Nadine. He had not been a namby-pamby weakling like Eustace, urged by other motives; he had been a *man* all through, and a gentleman. No whining and insinuation that *anything* had been Nadine's fault. No suggestion that he had been *tempted*—he had just shouldered the whole business and with pride and joy taken the girl—because he loved her.

The scene in the shack? Yes, but how had *he* behaved at the Grand Duke's party upon much less cause? . . . If Nadine was intoxicated—as Lady Crombie assured him, on the word of Miss Blenkinsop, that she was, what man on earth could have resisted her blandishments?

Sir Edward suffered greatly. He had been unjust and unkind. He had insulted a gentleman who deserved every sympathy. And now what was to be done? Nothing for the present. Only he would certainly take Nadine back with him to England. He would apologize and ask her to forget and forgive—and eventually, when she had had a season in London, she would meet some one suitable to her, and settle down among her own



nation. And he—Edward Pelham—would offer a humble apology to the young mining engineer, on the soonest possible occasion, when he returned from Canada.

So he wrote to Lady Crombie—and said he understood, and would never again blame Nadine. He was leaving in about ten days for a fishing trip, but would come back in the middle of September, and if she would keep his child until then, everything all round would be forgotten and forgiven. It cost him something to write this letter, but he did not hesitate.

Lady Crombie received it the very day before Mr. Howard B. Hopper's magnificent party.

Nadine was like a person drugged during all this time.

The underneath real soul of her was sad and lonely. Constantly thinking of her love—for she loved Bayard Delaval truly and really. And the outside self—with every gipsy instinct in the ascendant—welcomed the narcotic of pleasure and incense to her vanity in the attentions of the blatant, incredibly vulgar, multi-millionaire.

But the mills of fate were grinding—and soon some results would show.

The marriage of Eustace and Sadie had taken place as soon as Sadie could have what she considered a suitable wedding.

Eustace had declared his feelings on the return journey east, and Sadie had condescended to accept him—to console him for the shock to his finer emotions which the Nadine-Bayard affair must have given him! But she had not forgotten in her jolly good, practical heart, that she meant to find out what was the real truth of

that happening. . . . When once an engagement ring was safely upon her own hand!

By tactful and insidious questioning of Eustace, she elicited a description of what he had seen at the shack, and got from him that his impression was, that certainly it was possible that the whisky had made Nadine so tipsy that she played the devil with Bayard.

“ You and I know perfectly well, Sadie, that Nadine was awfully gone on Delaval all along. If I had not been so fearfully attracted by you, darling, I would have been jealous.”

In an instant Sadie's clear brain had fathomed the truth.

Nadine was tipsy. She showed her real feelings. Sir Edward was shocked—and insisted upon a marriage taking place. Why they had parted after, was still a mystery to both Sadie and Eustace. But that spirit of fair play made Sadie write to her father, and tell him the story as far as she knew it, for she was aware that her father had liked and respected Bayard Delaval and would be glad to have him cleared in his mind. So the letter went, and became an instrument of fate—as so often little unimportant trifles prove to be in the lives of all human beings.

## CHAPTER XXIV

THE day before Mr. Hopper's magnificent fête, Lady Crombie's uneasiness had become so great in regard to the way Nadine was drifting along, that on receipt of Sir Edward's letter, she had sent him a telegram just saying that it was quite necessary that he should come to Washington immediately, before going off to his fishing trip—and in her heart she hoped that he would arrive by an afternoon train the following day, perhaps in time to use his influence with Nadine not to attend the party—she felt that the child would no longer pay any attention to orders. The wildest rumours had gone abroad about the entertainment. Lady Crombie found herself in a very awkward position. Nadine was her guest. She had originally been responsible for her meeting the set she had now become surrounded with, and she was in a touchy and excitable state, ready, so to speak, to kick over traces. Lady Crombie felt that if she spoke to her, she might walk out of the house, and go and stay with one or other of the new friends, which would be disastrous. The poor lady had no one to confide in after Miss Blenkinsop had sailed for England—and the responsibility was growing more than she could bear.

When she had told Nadine that Eustace and Sadie were coming in about a week, Nadine had gone into a fit of laughter. Everything seemed unbalanced about her. "Oh, what a retribution for Eustace," she said. "Sadie is a pet, but he will have to obey her like a



dog. He won't have an easy time as he would have had with me. But every one to his taste—and in this country, thank goodness, it is the girls who rule.”

“Do you think so always, dear? I—wonder.”

Nadine fell into silence—she had suddenly remembered Bayard, and Montrose's love song. . . . No—there was a man no woman could rule—and the same strange quiver of longing for him came over her. Then she got up abruptly and went out of the room.

Poor little bruised heart!

Blenkie's going had troubled her for a day or so. It felt as if the last link with the past had been removed. She was absolutely free now, and intended to remain so.

“You'll love going back to that stuffy old Pelham, Blenkie,” she had laughed when they had said good-bye. “Thank goodness, it is not me.”

“Nadine, it is your home, dear—you belong to it, and it belongs to you,” was all Miss Blenkinsop replied with dignity—and the words sunk into Nadine's mind.

Sir Edward had most handsomely pensioned the faithful governess, and given her a very charming old house close to the park gates at Pelham—where the worthy creature could continue her charitable activities, and look after the many lady-bountiful interests which Nadine was too young as yet to have put upon her shoulders—even if she should ever return to live there—which sometimes Blenkie doubted. For a strange sullen spirit ruled the child, which Blenkie could not have believed had lain there, well as she knew her.

“I am afraid, dear Lady Crombie, that Sir Edward's and my bringing up of Nadine has not been very success-

ful," she said the day she left. "I feel that we did not make sufficient allowances for the heredity in her."

"I always thought so, Miss Blenkinsop, from long ago when she was eleven—you were both too stern and suppressing. A nature like Nadine's can only be ruled through her emotions."

Miss Blenkinsop sighed.

"I tremble to think what may become of her."

"So do I," and the two ladies had then fallen into silence.

While Lady Crombie was dispatching her telegram, Nadine was contemplating the dress she meant to wear at the Hopper fête—a clinging thing of marvellous silver and *diamanté* embroideries—with a wide band of *diamanté* for her hair. Far, far too old and unsuitable for her childish figure, but very becoming. All the garments which she had bought were on the side of being *outré*—and a desire to dazzle and be a little eccentric had arisen in her.

Numbers of the young men felt that they were "just crazy" about her, but Howard B. Hopper's pursuit was so persistent, that no one else had had a chance.

At a theatre and supper party the night before the fête, he asked Nadine to marry him. Nadine laughed. It made her nervous—and it flattered her immensely. She had developed the art of repartee now though, and gave him no definite answer. He assured her that he adored her, that she was just the most perfect thing God ever made, and that there would not be a caprice in this world of hers which he would not gratify.

He tried to take her hand in the automobile, coming back to the Crombies' residence—but this Nadine would

not allow. She had some strange dislike to being touched, and had not yet acquired the familiar boy and girl manners of her friends. Some queer thought of Bayard always came when any of the young men held her tight, when they danced, or showed any signs of beginning to make love to her. Some feeling that she still belonged to him—and must never have anyone but him. Then she would check herself, and try to be as charming as possible.

When she was alone in her sitting-room, having said a hurried good-night to Mr. Hopper at about two in the morning, she asked herself what she should do? It was wonderful having a proposal of marriage, and what fun to be able to do exactly what she liked for the rest of her life! But—there were many buts—which she would not face. Nadine was by no means a heroine, and had now come to a stage in her life when she could very easily take the wrong turning. Bayard had once told her that some day she might give herself a surprise—and to-night she remembered that he had said this, and felt that it was true.

Even though the marriage was annulled, she had always some underneath feeling that she was waiting for something else further to happen about it. She had come to the conclusion, from things she had gathered from Blenkie, that her father had been very shocked because she was alone with Bayard for half the night—and that is why he had either consented to, or insisted upon, the marriage. She had lost the idea that Bayard was to blame. It was all completely mysterious and she could not explain it, however she pondered over it. He could not really have loved her, that was evident. Here



was a man who *did* love her—and if she could not have her ideal, it was surely wiser to take what was going to give her everything else that could divert and delight her! But Hopper—whew! that was a dreadful name—“Nadine Hopper.”

She gave a nervous little laugh. All her new friends envied her the admiration of the millionaire, so that was in his favour. Human beings always value more highly that which others want, and Nadine was not peculiar in this particular.

“Well, I need not decide yet,” she told herself at last; “but I suppose I had better take him. I wish he was not going bald. Bayard had such thick—Oh! I must not, must not, think of him!”

One of the first things she had done in Gold Stamp was to have her films developed of the photographs that she had taken on the train—and it had been almost a shock to her to find that Bayard’s face came out, not the squaw’s, when she was snapping them on the platform at Albuquerque. She had looked at it—and kissed it—and then put it away between the leaves of *The Story of Bayard*—she must never waste a thought on either again—both had failed her lamentably. There were no perfect knights now, and the sight of the book only hurt her. But as she reasoned with herself about Howard B. Hopper, the strongest desire came over her to look at the photograph of Bayard once more. She resisted this, and in an evil mood undressed and went to bed.

When Mr. Bronson received Sadie’s letter he was at San Francisco. It caused him much relief, and it made

him decide that he would go on to Gold Stamp again for a day before he joined his daughter and son-in-law in Washington—where Eustace had most unexpectedly been transferred from Rome. He felt very glad that he could think better of his Chief Mining Engineer.

The two men only met though when Mr. Bronson would be leaving in an hour or two for the East—because Bayard had not been able to come in from the mine earlier.

They greeted one another, and Bayard noticed that his old friend seemed more cordial than he expected him ever to be again.

When they had finished talking of their mutual interest—the mine—there was a silence. Mr. Bronson puffed his cigar.

“I would be very glad to hear the truth of that strange marriage of yours, Delaval,” he said after a moment. “Not from idle curiosity, but so as I shan’t do any injustice in my mind to either of you.”

“I wanted to see you about it, Mr. Bronson,” Bayard answered almost eagerly. “I behaved like the most infernal blockhead.”

Mr. Bronson raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

“We had all noticed that you had a crush on each other,” he remarked.

Then Bayard went on:

“It was more than that. I loved Nadine with my whole heart, and I believed she loved me. We had just dismounted for a minute to look at the view from the Golden Canyon—when the snake nearly finished her. I cut her shoulder with my knife, and that scared her to death—before she fainted. All her shirt waist got torn

in doing that, and I carried her to a shack I built up there, that I work in sometimes. I gave her a whole tumbler full of whisky and she slept for hours. Then I gave her some more when she woke up. She seemed all right, a little excited perhaps. She said she liked me and would stay with me always, and then when I went out to look and see if help was coming she put the record on the Victrola and began to dance." Bayard's voice hesitated now and went on in a lower key. "Mr. Bronson—she was fascinating beyond anything you can imagine—and I do not know how it occurred—but I had at last just bent to kiss her, when Sir Edward and Eustace Pelham came in. I know I should not have given way to temptation—I have no excuse to offer—there was no wickedness in it, just a kiss—but of course to come in on the Victrola going, and her disordered appearance—and—and——Well, Sir Edward naturally thought the worst, because as she had been dancing, he did not believe the snake had harmed her much. I do not blame him for his attitude—it was just all darned hard luck. We went right back to the Justice of the Peace, all of us together—and Nadine seemed very quiet, and perhaps a little dazed, but repeated the words in the ceremony quite correctly. I did not have any idea that she was still under the effects of the whisky. I took her back to the hotel, and you all went away. Doctor Heathcott came and gave her a strong dope—I did not know this would only add to the confusion of her memory. When she woke up, and I expected to see her happy and loving as she had been in the shack—— My God, Mr. Bronson, the shock was awful when she screamed with fear of me, and I found



that she had not known anything that had happened since I cut her shoulder with the knife. She reproached me in horror when the landlady called her 'Mrs. Delaval' and I told her we were married. And it just staggered me. So I rushed out not to lose a moment for the annulment, and as soon as I explained that Miss Pelham was unconscious, and we none of us knew it, and that now she was awake, and she must have the marriage annulled, they quite got it—and of course pulled every string of the law for me." Bayard's voice as he stopped speaking gave Mr. Bronson the idea that this was only half of what he had to say—and that the rest was difficult for him to express. So he waited quietly, and at last said:

"Well, boy?"

Bayard clenched his hands.

"Well—I believe now she only acted in that way because she was not quite awake and her last memory of me was my cutting her shoulder—and—and—that the real girl was fond of me; but I was too mad at the time, and sent the application for annulment for her to sign, when she was waiting for me to come back to her. She was stung, of course, and signed, and we never saw each other again. I think I behaved like an awful fool, and brute."

"You love her still?" Mr. Bronson's voice was grave.

"More than ever."

"What do you mean to do about it?"

"I want to go as soon as I can, and try to see her, wherever she is, and see if I cannot win back her affection again—at all events, even if that is lost for good

and all—I would like to have an explanation with her.”

“ She is in Washington with Lady Crombie, a family friend of theirs, who is over with her husband on the British Mission. When can you go East? ”

“ I have got to be in Rockers Point to-morrow—to investigate the new claim the Corporation has taken on, as you know, sir. I cannot possibly do it under a fortnight’s hardest work.”

“ Well, come then boy, and join me at the *Willard*. My daughter and her husband, Eustace Pelham, will be there by then, and I know Sadie will do everything she can for you.”

Then they wrung each other’s hands, and Mr. Bronson took his train to Los Angeles, and Bayard went back to the mine, comforted. But a good deal can happen in two weeks.

## CHAPTER XXV

NADINE was very pleased with her appearance when Augustine put the finishing touches to her hair and the high *diamanté* band in the form of a tiara; she said to herself:

“Of course, if I marry Mr. Hopper” (she never even thought of him as “Howard”), “the first thing he must give me must be a real diamond one exactly the same shape!”

This idea exalted her—jewels, glitter, just as it would have exalted her mother—and made her feel very favourably disposed towards the millionaire. She put her cloak round her before she left her room because she knew Lady Crombie would not approve of her garment. She would be up dressing for dinner, she hoped, and she gave Augustine a sweet message to deliver saying she was so late she had to rush off without running in to see her!

Then she crept down the stairs like a mouse and to the waiting automobile, which Mr. Hopper had sent for her.

The house the Crombies had taken was a fine one, with a stately hall and magnificent staircase, which divided each way to the gallery above. Nadine would have liked to have walked slowly down the broad steps, and allowed the little tail of train, which fell from one side of her draperies, to have swept behind her, but discretion held her. To get off in safety was the main thing!



Just as she reached the outer hall, and the footman was opening the door for her, Lord Crombie came in. He had been detained at the conference very late.

“What a lovely lady!” he said, and bowed in a courtly way as he offered her his arm to lead her down the steps; but there was a whimsical twinkle in his eyes which Nadine did not like, it made her very uncomfortable. Although she was not very fine of perception, she knew that it meant that her host found her a little ridiculous! His manner of offering her his arm was one he would have employed to an elderly Duchess!

Her blue eyes flashed, she threw a kiss from her finger-tips as the car moved off—her red lips pouting, and a world of challenge in her whole expression.

“It looks as though there might be the devil to pay to-night,” Lord Crombie mused as he entered the house; and if old James, the groom, had been there he would have said:

“Wind in its tail—wind in its tail!”

A sense of rebellion was in Nadine’s whole being, and yet underneath an uncomfortable feeling that there was something that she would not face. She was fond of the Crombies and could not force herself to be indifferent to their opinion of her.

But everything was forgotten in the rapturous greeting the host gave her on her arrival at the Hopper Palace, accompanied by one of her new friends, Adala Meeking, who had been divorced twice and married for the third time, while yet not twenty-seven years old; and whom Lady Crombie did not consider an ideal chaperone. Nadine had called for her on the way.

“Why this is just fine,” Mr. Hopper said, and with possessive cordiality took Nadine’s arm to lead her in. When he touched her the same queer sense of resentment came up in her, just as it had done years before when she was a child, and Prince Kurousov had picked her up in his arms. A fierceness filled her eyes—which Mr. Howard B. Hopper found absolutely delightful.

“Good night!” he said to himself, “*Some girl!*” The gorgeous house was a bower of roses, and as the cocktails had already been twice round, the guests were in the gayest of moods. There seemed only to have been the one thing wanting to complete every one’s felicity, and that was Nadine’s arrival! Of course she meant to accept him, Mr. Hopper felt, and wouldn’t they make things *hum* when once she was Mrs. Howard B.! The party now filed into the gorgeous banquetting hall of pale-green marble, which had been built on to the old house. Fountains played in the centre, and the tables were grouped round it, with statues of ice cupids with lights inside them, to keep the atmosphere cool—quite needed as the champagne was to flow in rivers during the whole evening!

Nadine felt deliciously excited. She did not as yet take cocktails because they made her head ache when she had tried them, and smoking made her absolutely sick; but she meant to overcome her aversion to both things, because it was so dull to be behind the times! Only she would not make the experiment to-night, as she wanted to enjoy every moment of this wonder show! To be the acknowledged Queen of such a fête would have gone to the head of any girl of eighteen and a half

years old whose heart was sore, and whose vanity had been hurt, and with Nadine's hereditary instincts the whole thing had a strong effect upon her!

She had learned not to be shy, and to keep up the ball of continual chaff, so she was able to scream with joy when each lady opened her table napkin, and a white dove flew up from it, some perching upon the heads of the company, they were so tame; others flying to the top of the vaulted roof, where climbing rose trees had been arranged to grow!

A very exotic Eastern scent was mingled with the water of the fountains, and countless black waiters dressed in gorgeous Eastern costumes dispensed the over-rich food!

"We'll show them how, in your country some day!" Mr. Hopper said during the banquet. "Gee! that will make me proud when I can see 'Mrs. Howard B. Hopper, *née* Miss Nadine Pelham,' in print!"

"But I have not said that I will marry you, Mr. Hopper!" Nadine answered as archly as she could; something in her had resented his tone of assurance.

He was not the least abashed.

"Well, I mean to go on asking you until you accept me. I'm like the undertaker—I'll get you in the end!"

Nadine gave a little shiver. Mr. Hopper's style of wit was not quite what she could have desired, but she must not be so critical. It was "Pelmanish" to be critical, and she was going to get away from all those old influences, so she laughed instead of wincing, as she would have winced six months before, and spurred herself on to more daring gaiety.



\* \* \* \* \*

By the time that the Crombies had finished their solitary dinner, and were beginning to think of bed, and to wonder if Lady Crombie's wire to their old friend had ever reached him, Sir Edward himself turned up! He had come by the first train he was able to catch.

"Well, what is it?" he asked when they had greeted him. "About Nadine, of course!"

"Yes," said Lady Crombie rather diffidently. "The child has somehow slipped into the wrong set here, and is getting herself rather talked about—and I—felt I would prefer that you were on the spot, as the responsibility is too great."

Sir Edward paled. Was the girl and her temperament going to prove a menace for all her life? "I shall take her back to England with me at once, Viola; she must have got completely out of hand."

Here Lord Crombie interposed:

"My dear Ned, you will not be able to do any ordering, I fear. You may be able to coax her to return with you, but the ordeal through which she has passed has left its mark upon the child's spirit in no small degree, and that is why she takes pleasure in these feather-brains here; it is to kill remembrance, I am sure—not from any bad impulse."

"I will not have the name of Pelham further disgraced," and an iron look came round Sir Edward's mouth. But Lady Crombie wondered to herself how he would be able to prevent it!

"Where is she this evening?" the troubled man asked after a little more conversation.

"At a fête given by one of the most impossible

bounders in Washington," Lord Crombie answered, "at his palatial 'home.' You may remember the house with the beautiful garden which used to belong to these delightful Lees when we were here as younger secretaries, Ned? Well, a certain Hopper—Howard B. Hopper—bought it from them, and has turned it into a palace."

"Nadine goes off without consulting you—her hosts! What can have come to the girl!" Sir Edward exclaimed.

"I feel that it is my fault," Lady Crombie interposed. "By an unlucky chance she met all these giddy young people the first night that we went out, and they have clung to her like leeches ever since, and of course they are youthful and probably amusing after her quiet life."

"I hear the bounder makes tremendous advances to Nadine," and Lord Crombie sank into an arm-chair, they had all been standing hitherto. "But I don't suppose she would think of him seriously, would she, Viola?"

"Of course not! What an absurd idea?" but Lady Crombie's voice faltered a little on the last word. What if Nadine should be contemplating this dreadful thing? "There seems nothing to be done to-night and Ned must be famished. Ah! that is good news!" as at that moment the butler announced that supper for Sir Edward was ready.

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile the banquet at Mr. Howard B. Hopper's mansion was drawing to a close, and new enchantments would soon begin. The couples had been dancing

between each course, and so the feast had lasted from eight until eleven in the marble hall, and now a new phase would present itself!

Mr. Hopper had taken enough of various spirits to be thoroughly confident; but drunk or sober, his sense of self-preservation never slept, and it now warned him that he must be fairly patient, and not go too far in his pursuit of the little English girl.

Nadine had had two glasses of champagne and was outwardly in the wildest spirits, but deep down in her heart there was a weight of lead. That strange depression which seems to cause a sinking even underneath great excitement.

She felt that she was being rushed along down a mill-race, and that there was some awful abyss ahead, but that she must laugh and be gayer than she had ever been. The scarlet flush was in her olive-ivory cheeks and her eyes were bright as stars. She chaffed and fenced with her assiduous host, and with all the other young men—she had never been so dazzlingly alluring.

“Some girl,” they all felt!

Mr. Hopper had grown more and more familiar, he called her “honey” as they danced, and “sweetie” and “cutie”—which Nadine pretended not to hear; and now the moment had come for going into the garden where the most exciting part of the whole entertainment was to take place.

It was one of those intensely hot still nights, the 31st of August. The sky was inky black and far away in the distance there were faint rumbles of thunder. But the darkness of heaven only helped to render more



brilliant the effect of the myriads of electric lamps which turned the lake into a sheen of silver and ruby, and green and gold.

“ Oh! how divine! ” cried Nadine as the party came down from the terrace towards it. “ Oh, you wonderful man! ”

And as Howard B. Hopper rather lurched towards her, he felt that his reward would not be long delayed!

## CHAPTER XXVI

**I**T truly was a marvellous scene which met their view. The great galley moored to the bank might have belonged to a doge, and the little canoes looked tempting if very frail craft, and the mermaids swam about showing their glittering fish's tails, their long hair, entwined with water-lillies, and wreathed with shells, flowed over their nude backs. Neptune, enthroned majestically upon his pointed rock in the centre, brandished his trident. While the white swans, rather frightened, swam rapidly up and down, drawing their miniature gondolas, and the black ones retired to a corner in stately disgust!

At the end where the marble steps descended into the water, a regular bower of roses had been constructed amidst the marble pillars making a kind of stage, and here the Russians would dance later—their own musicians grouped upon the steps.

The more sedate of the guests, and those who were not too sure of their equilibrium, flocked into the galley, or state barge, where no danger of an impromptu bath need worry them! but the adventurous spirits clamoured to embark in the canoes, and about a dozen pairs got off safely, launched by Venetian gondoliers.

“Watch your step, folks!” shouted the host, “or old Neptune'll sure claim you!” and there were feminine shrieks of anticipation, as the partners made the canoes rock!

Nadine was quivering with excitement when Mr. Hopper led her down the steps and to the canoe destined

for them, and when she was seated she seemed the very spirit of the feast. The lights caught her high *diamanté* tiara making it a stream of fire—and her mother's face had never looked more fierce and untamed.

Mr. Hopper was triumphant.

He paddled the canoe to the other end of the lake—a distance of not more than forty yards perhaps—and then let it drift. A wonderful band, hidden beyond the trees, played inspiring music, which mingled with the gay shrieks of the girls in the canoes, and the low rumbles of thunder in the distance, which however seemed to be coming nearer. An electric tension was in the air—every one was wild—and some intoxicated as well. Mr. Hopper poured out champagne for Nadine and handed her the glass.

“Drink to the day when you're mine, Peachy!” he said, and swallowed his down! The strange feeling of sinking and emptiness was growing in Nadine—she was not quite sure what was going to happen—whether she should shriek aloud with laughter, like the other girls, or faint. So she took the glass and drank it.

“Here is to life,” she said. “And love,” Mr. Hopper added, pouring out a second glass for himself. Nadine laughed hysterically, and rocked the canoe, very nearly upsetting them!

“Say, gurl!” Mr. Hopper called to a mermaid who was swimming near, “Stand by to catch us!” and he emptied another bottle of champagne over her shell-wreathed head, and into her open mouth, to the delight of the guests who were near!

Then from the bower at the end of the lake, the Russian dancers emerged, lovely girls in pale blue velvet



dresses all trimmed with white fur, and high yellow boots. The musicians took their places on the marble steps, the other band stopped and new wild sounds began and the dancers stamped and cried aloud as they whirled around.

With the very first notes Nadine stiffened, and when "The Red Sarafane" wove itself into the rhythm, electric thrills ran through her, and she lost all sense of time and place.

"Oh, the dear Russian music!" she cried, beating time with her fan, then starting up suddenly in the rocking canoe. "Who'll dance with me?" she called, and with a bound she was on the frail little table which separated her from Mr. Hopper, and kicking off the dish of sandwiches, and the bottles, and glasses and plates, she began to dance some steps. The canoe rocked violently, and a loud clap of thunder drowned even the roar of applause. Then with a wild whoop, excited beyond any consideration, Nadine made a beautiful dive into the lake, capsizing the canoe and its other occupant as she leaped!

Yells of delight greeted this feat! and she began to swim rapidly towards the steps to join the Russians, the mermaids following her, while a spot light fixed in a tree kept a golden glitter upon her *diamanté* band!

The entire party now were shouting with frenzied glee and excitement, and as she passed the great barge, a young Russian guest dived in and followed her!

Mr. Hopper, quite unprepared for his ducking, sank to the bottom of the lake, and swallowed muddy water before he could strike out for safety!

There was Neptune's rock not so far away! and he

made for that, a spluttering, draggled, dripping object, the bald patch on his head shining white in the lights, when the immersion had swept back the carefully arranged hair.

“Gowd—my pearl stud!” he gasped in terror, but being a fine swimmer he was able to use one hand, and pulled the stud out of his shirt front, and put it in his mouth—then he swam to the rock.

“You return to your element, father!” he ordered Neptune, “and give me your throne,” and when the obedient god had plunged into the water, Howard B. Hopper hung on to the rock, waving one arm excitedly as he cheered Nadine on, his words rather incoherent because of the monster pearl still in his mouth! This was the sort of wife he wanted! Gee! she had put over a great stunt! Meanwhile, the Russian dancers, mad with excitement, were executing marvellous steps—and the imitation snow had begun to fall in countless flakes upon them, from a captive balloon, as Nadine, well ahead of her train of mermaids, and her Russian follower, reached the steps, and walked up out of the water. Her dress, clinging enough when dry, was now but a skin over her slender body. Her crisp curly hair, a little deranged by the plunge, was not however draggled, and the *diamanté* band had kept firmly in its place. With an air of supreme insolent assurance she walked up to the eager young men who had rushed from the barge to meet her. But she waved them all aside.

“I’ll only dance with him who had the pluck to follow me,” she cried, and the young Russian emerging from the water now sprang to her side.

The dancing girls made way for them, the musicians

banged their instruments, and amidst thunder claps and lightning, and shrieks and shouts of joy, the pair stamped and writhed and twirled beneath the falling snow! until Nadine fell almost exhausted into the young man's waiting arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was no wonder that the papers next day contained blazing headlines concerning this party!

"Daughter of English Baronet plunges into lake at 'Poppa' Hopper's orgie."

"Daring dive from canoe by English aristocrat, daughter of Sir Edward Pelham"—etc., etc., and others more extravagant still!

Mr. Hopper had applauded ecstatically from Neptune's rock, and then had scrambled into a humble dinghy sent to fetch him, and he had insisted upon Nadine's returning to the house and taking immediately a hot bath when at last the crazy dance ended. Her friend, Mrs. Meeking, accompanied her, and a rabble of admirers followed. They only arrived on the veranda when torrents of rain burst, and crashing thunder rent the air, while blue lightning terrified the stampeded guests, who were only too glad to shelter in the marble hall again, and imbibe tumblers of hot punch!

But once the dance finished, all bravado had deserted Nadine, and she was glad to retire alone upstairs to the magnificent bedroom suite.

"This is for you—if I have to wait till the cows come home," Mr. Hopper told her, and then he left her to Mrs. Meeking, and a couple of maids, to whom he whispered husky instructions.



There was an ermine cloak which he had bought a bargain at a summer price, and had intended to give to Polly just before Nadine came upon the scene. Then he changed his mind, and it had stayed in a drawer. It should be brought out now, and a suit of his best silk pajamas as well, and a new pair of bedroom slippers, and they should all be offered to her instead of her own dripping clothes!

Mrs. Meeking accepted for her, and hustled her into the alabaster bathroom, and began with the help of one maid to undress her, while the second maid poured a whole bottle of Mr. Hopper's own exotic scent into the bath!

"Don't lock the door, honey," Mrs. Meeking advised, when the dress was off, and Nadine could manage alone. "In case you should feel faint I'll wait here in the bedroom with the maids, and you just sing out when you want us!"

So a little shrinking girl at last stepped down into the hot water, and lay there and tried to think, but the scent revolted her, though she was still too numbed by the champagne and the excitement to have any sense of values. She only felt that the water was comforting her, and that she was half-asleep.

"You're sure you are all right?" Mrs. Meeking's shrill kindly voice called presently, and roused her, and she came back to reality and left the bath.

Then she was made to drink a tumbler of punch when she got into the bedroom wrapped in a great sponge-cloth peignoir, which had been warming on the hot pipes while she bathed.

"And see what your devoted beau has sent for

you to wear!" Adala Meeking said, displaying the ermine wrap, and the pajamas. "If you don't think this is cute!"

So it was in this guise—her tiny feet thrust into the big slippers, and her slender body lost in the pink silk pajamas, and swathed in the ermine cloak which had been destined for Mr. Hopper's mistress!—that Nadine—daughter of that long line of Pelhams—returned to the Crombies' roof!

Mr. Hopper and Mrs. Meeking accompanied her, and held her between them, because the punch had made her fall off to sleep as they drove.

She awakened with a start—and was just conscious enough to be aware that it was fortunate that her latch-key had remained in her own cloak's pocket and was not at the bottom of the lake! and that no servant would see her creep up to bed. She said good-night very quietly, too worn out to struggle, when her whilom host put his arm round her to lead her up the steps. And at last she was alone in her room, and soon in bed; but just before she turned out the light, her eye caught *The Story of Bayard* on the table, and she burst into a passion of tears. Oh, what would Bayard think of her, had he been there to-night!

## CHAPTER XXVII

NADINE'S awakening on that first day of September was heavy as lead and just as her eyes had alighted upon a man's clothes upon that other occasion in her life, when a strange adventure had befallen her, so now they lit on Mr. Howard B. Hopper's pink silk pajamas hanging over a chair!

She bounded up—of all things Augustine must not see these! She rolled them into a bundle and thrust them into an unused drawer in a cabinet. Then out of bravado she stood up defiantly and looked at herself in the glass. Her blue eyes were haggard and her cheeks pale—"I think I must have been crazy last night—or tipsy," she moaned to herself, and sprang back into bed.

She had never felt more wretched in all her life.

Augustine came in presently with a cup of tea, her face a mask. Augustine loved her little mistress, and looked upon all she did with a lenient eye; but she had read the papers—and well——! After all, Mademoiselle Pelham—was an aristocrat!—and *ladies* did not generally make scandals like this!

Defiance once more entered Nadine's spirit! If her maid even showed disapproval, what could she expect from the Crombies—when she came down!

She put on a jaunty air—ordered her bath, and said she would have her hair done in a new way, and would try on a perfectly gorgeous tea-gown that she had bought—suitable to a woman of forty—and some new shoes with ridiculous heels—and then she went into



the bathroom humming a tune—until she stopped abruptly, becoming conscious that it was “The Red Sarafane!”

She got into the bath and lay there and thought. Why had this particular air such an effect upon her? It seemed mixed in her destiny—What was destiny, anyway?—Could one change it? or was one just a puppet rolled hither and thither?

A cynical mood came at last, and the worst side of her nature was in ascendance when she rejoined Augustine in the bedroom. Her breakfast had come up now—and with it—the papers! They lay on a table beside the sofa in her sitting-room. She had her hair done first, and slipped into the gorgeous robe before she glanced at them. Then when she read the headlines, a brilliant scarlet flush came into her pale cheeks, and her eyes flashed savagely. All trace of Pelham seemed to have left her, and Nada, the gipsy, sat there crouched up in the pillows. Augustine was in the bedroom arranging the dressing-table. Nadine looked at her uncompromising back through the archway and gave a bitter laugh. Then she flung the journals down, and picking up two little Chinese fans she popped them into her hair like Spanish combs, and jumping up, began to dance in front of a long mirror.

“I have burned my ships now,” she said to herself defiantly, “and what do I care!”

It is unpleasant to have to act bravado for the benefit of others, but truly painful when it must be done for oneself! The queer, empty, sinking feeling pervaded the poor little girl.

There was a knock at the door—Augustine went to

it. It was a monster box of roses from Mr. Hopper with his card. "Have you seen the papers? You were great last night," was written on it. "When may I come for my answer?—telephone me——" and he had scribbled the number of his office.

This comforted Nadine—here was one person who would not condemn her! In the eyes of Howard B. Hopper she was "great"! . . . The depression lifted a little. Augustine opened the huge box for her. The roses were colossal and the scent was good. Augustine now discreetly left the room.

When she was alone Nadine began to take the blossoms and put them in a vase—not tasting her breakfast; she put the card down on the table beside her.

In a minute or two she picked up the papers again, and read each allusion to the party through. It did sound all pretty terrible, but Mr. Hopper thought her "*great*"! She must not forget that!

While she lay there playing with a glorious rose she had pulled down from the rest, Lady Crombie came into the room, the journal with the most sensational account of the party in her hand.

She took in at once the situation. Defiance was written on every line of the pathetic little figure. She noted the unsuitable garment, and the vulgar suggestion the Chinese fans gave to the little face—it was all bizarre and barbaric—poor, poor child! Tears came into Lady Crombie's kind eyes. "She is not really bad, or vulgar, or even very fierce," she thought to herself, "that is why she would never succeed in being wicked, the timid gentle part would come up at the wrong moment!"

"Good morning!" Nadine said smilingly.

“ Good morning, dear. You know your father arrived from Canada last night, while you were out—I am afraid he must have seen—this!” And Lady Crombie held out the paper.

Nadine went into one of her peals of laughter. “ Papa! Oh! how it must have upset the poor old boy!” and she rocked to and fro. “ Shan’t I catch it—dear Lady Crombie! and of course you are shocked too!”

“ I am not shocked, dear—I am only sad. All this excitement does not mean happiness,” and she sat down upon the end of the sofa at Nadine’s feet.

A change came over the poor child, her blue eyes grew misty.

“ No, but it helps one to forget.”

Lady Crombie was just going to express her sympathy and draw out the story of sorrow—and who knows if she had been able to do so, yet more complications might have been kept from Nadine’s life—but fate again intervened in the person of Sir Edward, who strode in, a crumpled journal grasped in his hand.

He had meant to be tender and kind to his child, and explain everything, and ask her forgiveness for the part he had played, but when he had read the scandalous paragraphs, his blood boiled with rage! Could she not even remember that she was a lady! His own flesh and blood thus to disgrace the Pelham name! It was not misunderstanding this time, she was not the victim of a snake-bite! She had deliberately gone to this impossible party, and must have completely lost her head. But people of breeding should *not* lose their heads—women at least!— he was obliged to add, thinking suddenly of Russia! Surely the teaching of Miss Blenkinsop, and



his own share in her nature, ought to have stood for something with Nadine!

He was white with anger and disgust by the time he reached his daughter's sitting-room. The *common* part of Nadine's nature came uppermost when she saw his face, an insolent sneering smile grew on her lips, and her blue eyes flashed with ugly mischief.

Her father paused a moment, horrified at her appearance, and at the change in her whole personality.

Was this his daughter—his little Nadine? This ridiculous dressed-up creature! His eyes travelled from the vulgar Chinese fans in her hair, to the more vulgar silver shoes—with heels four inches high! Then he said in a voice of ice:

“May I ask for an explanation of *this*,” and he struck the newspaper in his hand. Nadine drew herself up.

“You may ask what you please, papa, but I need not answer if I do not want to,” and she showed all her white teeth in a smile that might have been a snarl.

“How dare you disgrace the Pelham name in this way,” the angry parent continued in a still colder voice than before. “You shall come straight back to England with me immediately.”

Now she burst out laughing, a little hysterically, then she flew into a violent rage. She stamped her foot and she shook her fist with passion, and suddenly the room melted before Sir Edward's vision, and Nada stood there in her gipsy dress, flying at the chief of the troop, and biting his arm.

He grew white as death.

“How dare YOU speak to me,” Nadine shrieked

aloud. "The Pelham name! the Pelham name! Everything must be sacrificed to that! Life and love and human things—probably you killed my mother with your Pelham pride." But she had gone too far with her father—it seemed as if lightning came from his eyes and she quailed before it.

"Enough," he said with deadly quiet. Nadine turned like an animal at bay, and her eyes caught Howard B. Hopper's card on the table. She picked it up.

"Here is a name that I can do what I like with," she cried. "Hopper! It is common enough for me, and I shall take it and drag it in the mire if I wish. You would have married me to a namby-pamby Pelham—and then left me to a stranger—and now I will settle my own fate, and you and your Pelham name can get out of my existence."

She rushed round to the telephone, the card still in her hand, while Sir Edward and Lady Crombie stood back, too horrified to speak.

"Hallo!"

Then she gave the number—and almost immediately a voice answered—and she smiled a smile of triumph, fixing her eyes on her father.

"Yes, you may come this afternoon for your answer—to tea—at five o'clock. . . . What is it to be—?. . . well can't you guess?" then a laugh—and then:—"You said I was *great*, you know! I like being 'great.' . . . Au revoir!" and she put the receiver down.

"Now," she said to her father, "now, that is done; and you can welcome your future son-in-law."

But Sir Edward only turned to the door and left the room, and Lady Crombie followed him. And when Nadine was alone she sank upon the sofa again and stared in front of her—her courage and her anger had both died down.

But she was in up to her neck, truly her ships were burned and she must go on—there was no returning.

She was too wretched and too shamed for tears. There was no one in the world she could turn to now—who would understand or help—and then suddenly her thoughts flashed to Mrs. O'Hara. The rough desert landlady—who had seemed to realize what was passing in her soul—and who had given her advice based upon her knowledge of men—good advice too! and she would once more take it. Mr. Hopper (“shall I have to call him ‘Howard,’” she shivered)—Howard—must not see her with white face, and haggard eyes—he must see her triumphant and splendid, garbed as he would wish. So she rang for Augustine, and made her show her two new garments which had arrived the day before from the same place—and she chose a dreadful jetted black velvet and monkey fur confection with the side open nearly to her knee—and gave orders that she would put it on after lunch; meanwhile she was very tired and would sleep. Augustine could bring her up some soup at two o'clock.

“Which jupon will Mademoiselle wear,” Augustine asked, “with this . . . tea-gown? Mademoiselle may not have remarked that the skirt is . . . un peu——”

“I shan't wear a petticoat at all, they are quite old-fashioned,” her mistress snapped, and she curled up on



her sofa and shut her heavy lids. Augustine covered her with a squirrel rug and retired softly.

But when she reached the passage she shrugged her shoulders and spread out her hands rather violently:

“Mon Dieu! elle est folle!” she said.

\* \* \* \* \*

The telephone had rung at quite an awkward moment for Howard B. Hopper. He was sitting in his office having a rather disagreeable interview with Polly. She also had read the papers that morning.

The warm weather had broken, and it was chilly and grey—and quite the occasion to put on the new outlandish cat furs she had bought.

She had “let Poppa have it,” as she told herself she meant to do. He was not going to get by with his crush on that English girl—he would have to come across with a nice fat sum before she let him put that over—that was the dope! (Polly’s language was not altogether refined, but Howard B. Hopper understood her.)

“Why, cutie—you should worry—” he was just saying when the telephone had rung—and he took the receiver up.

His unctuous countenance beamed with delight when he heard the voice. Polly put out her gloved hand with the cat-fur gauntlet, to try and snatch the instrument from him, but he caught her wrist and continued to talk.

Might he really come?—what was his answer to be?—sure—he’d be there with bells on! and only when Nadine said *au revoir* did his grip relax upon Polly’s

wrist. She flew at him like a fury, until she saw his open cheque-book lying on the desk, and a comprehensive smile came into her cunning eyes.

Howard B. Hopper knew that the amount must be five figured to bridge this time. . . . Polly could throw a wrench in the gears—if she felt that way, and it was better to be on the safe side.

The eager glance watched the cheque being written, and when the last o was formed, Polly threw herself into her generous lover's arms.

“There, sweetie,” he said. “You beat it now, but Poppa 'll be around as usual by and by,” and off the lady went.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THAT afternoon Lady Crombie happened to be having several people to tea, but Nadine did not leave her room until five o'clock struck.

Sir Edward's face had been like the bust of Augustus Cæsar at luncheon, and the Crombies had not mentioned the subject of Nadine. There were fortunately one or two other members of the Mission there, which relieved the strain, and then Sir Edward had gone out, but by five o'clock he was again in one of the small drawing-rooms with his hostess. Lady Crombie felt nervous as she noticed the clock. Five was the hour Nadine had asked Mr. Hopper to come—what on earth would happen if he was announced before she came down!

Nadine had, however, thought out all this, and waited up in the gallery arrayed in her elderly bundle of black velvet and jet and monkey fur, with the side split up to her knee, and a long train flowing behind her, her hair dressed as a Spaniard and a high comb in it. She had an uncomfortable suspicion that she looked ridiculous, but an obstinate temper was in her. She *would* not let anyone intimidate her. Mr. Hopper was sure to admire her, and say "Your get-up is stunning, Peachy"—"*Peachy!*" would he go on calling her "Peachy"—when they were married? Here was the third man she was having to wonder about "when they were married!" She remembered how her timid thoughts used to speculate as to life in Rome with Eustace (was all that a hundred years ago?), and then



there were yet other speculations on that one brief morning when she had been married to Bayard. Here she drew in her breath sharply, a pain came round her heart. She must not think of that or of him—what would he have called her? She did not remember his using any form of endearment when they had looked at the sunset before the terrible snake came—the snake which had really been the cause of their wedding, and their parting. No, Bayard had just said, “Nadine, I love you,” and as her thoughts reached this stage, a passionate thrill of remembrance quivered through her. Ah! he had meant it then, surely. But down in the big square hall she could hear a new arrival just entering. Yes, it was Mr. Hopper—“Howard”—and she must stop him before he should be announced into the small drawing-room there beyond the archway. She went down the top part of the stairs quickly, and then walked slowly when she came into view. Mr. Hopper stopped, planted his feet wide apart, and nodded his head. “Aren’t you just great!” he said. “Your gown is perfect.” And as ever the flattery comforted the half-primitive spirit of the girl—and she met him at the foot of the stairs with a radiant smile.

“Say—where am I going to hear the good news? In here?” and he pointed to a sort of winter garden of palms and foliage which opened out beyond the staircase to the right. Nadine longed to hustle him into the drawing-room to the others. Now that it had come to the point she was terrified, but the Pelham part of her was courageous, and she controlled herself and determined to face the inevitable.

“Yes,” she answered, and led the way. Perhaps if she did not go too far among the palms and he thought servants might be coming by, he would not attempt to kiss her. This was her only coherent thought. But nothing could daunt Mr. Hopper.

“I’m just crazy about you, Peachy,” he whispered hoarsely, and clasped her in his arms. “And you’re going to be Mrs. Howard B. Gee! I’m proud!”

There was no use struggling—but oh! he must not—must not touch her lips! So Nadine buried her face in his coat, and left him only a cheek and an ear to choose from. He literally devoured both, and a shivering hideous disgust filled the poor child. “I’m wild—I’m wild about you,” Mr. Hopper murmured. . . . It had not struck him to ask her if she loved him. He was entirely occupied by his own gratification. He had secured what he wanted—which was her consent, and no other aspect of the case existed for him. “Now I want that cherry of a mouth,” he demanded. But Nadine broke away from him—her wits returning to defend herself. “No, no! not yet—you must give me time—Howard,” and she looked at him archly. “Let us go into the drawing-room now, and tell the Crombies and my father.”

“Not before my little ring is on your hand,” and he brought out a case, and disclosed an immense single-stone diamond, as big as a hazel-nut.

“They can see that across the room,” he said proudly, “and every one will know you’re mine.”

Nadine nearly went into one of her fits of laughter, she was almost hysterical, but she let her new fiancé take her little left hand—he made no mistake, like

Eustace, but slipped the blatant token upon the third finger, and then bent and kissed it.

“What a beautiful ring,” Nadine exclaimed. It seemed the only thing to say.

“It’s the best that money can buy; but only the number ones can ever be for you.”

“It is divine,” and she examined the marvellous stone with real admiration. “Thank you very much, and now I do want you to meet papa,” and taking his arm Nadine led Mr. Howard B. Hopper towards the archway which opened into this smaller drawing-room.

Sir Edward and Lord Crombie were standing with their backs to the fireplace, some lady guests were seated near Lady Crombie, who was pouring out the tea, and a young man or two from the Embassies conversed with some girls—not of the set of Nadine’s friends!

Every one looked up as the pair entered, and with complete assurance Mr. Hopper came over to the two elderly gentlemen after he had cordially greeted the chilly hostess.

“Say, I’m glad to meet you,” he announced to his future father-in-law, whom he slapped in a friendly way on the back; “guess you’ve no objection to give me Nadine?”

Sir Edward’s glance would have cowed almost anyone else in the world, but it had not the least effect upon the millionaire, who did not perceive it. That stand-offishness in the old boy was perfectly all right—he felt—showed he was the real thing, and knew how to be up stage.

“Mr. Hopper and I are engaged, papa,” Nadine



said, stroking the huge diamond, while her eyes filled with a malicious smile. "Do congratulate us."

Sir Edward bowed.

"My daughter is free to do as she pleases," he said icily. "I am sailing for England in two weeks. My best wishes to you both," then he turned to a lady near and took no further notice of either of them.

This rather damped Nadine's triumph. She would liked to have seen him angry and disturbed.

Every one else now congratulated them, and Lord Crombie fixed his glass in his eye.

But the one thing which was concerning Nadine was how she could manoeuvre not to be alone with her fiancé before he left. A bitter little laugh came to her lips when she remembered how she never wanted to be left with Eustace either. It was grimly humorous really. Must fiancés always be—physically distasteful? It seemed so.

She would put on airs, and show caprice—all the girls with whom she spent her time ruled all the men, and never considered anyone but themselves, so she would do likewise. To be coquettishly dictatorial to Mr. Hopper must be her line of action, until she had coached herself to stand his caresses.

Howard B. Hopper was radiant. He had no misgivings.

Once the affair was an accomplished fact, Lady Crombie became coldly gracious. She felt that probably Nadine would be grateful to her if she could arrange that she should have an evening away from the giddy crew, so she said when Mr. Hopper sprawled familiarly beside her on her sofa:

“ I hope you will allow us to keep Nadine at home this evening because I want her to go to bed early. I am afraid the wetting she had last night, when the canoe upset, has quite knocked her up, and she should have a long rest.”

“ Why, certainly,” agreed the millionaire; he was thinking that he had better go and see Polly to be sure that she was planning no coup. “ Why, certainly. Give her all the care that you can, Lady Crombie. I’ll be round in the morning to take her horseback riding. I’ve a new mare for her to try out.”

Lady Crombie acquiesced. Then he went on: “ There is no need of any length of engagement. I’d like the wedding to take place before Sir Edward goes. Say, Nadine,” and he beckoned to her as she sat by an elderly lady. “ Will you agree to be Mrs. Howard B. before your poppa crosses the mill-pond—what do you say to a swell wedding in twelve days’ time? ”

Nadine thought of a picture she had once seen of a Christian martyr being led to a lion’s cage. Well, as it was going to be, it had better be as soon as possible—or she might not have the nerve to go through with it.

“ That will be splendid—Howard,” she answered with a defiant glance at her father, who however remained frozen and uninterested.

“ Then that is settled,” and Mr. Hopper rose with his assured cordiality. He made his adieux to the hostess, walked over to Sir Edward, who was again standing by the fireplace, and held out his hand.

“ I’ll be proud to have you for a pa-in-law,” he announced, and with a familiar pat on the shoulder he wrung Sir Edward’s unwilling hand. Then beckoning

Nadine again with a crooked first finger, he made his exit, drawing her into the hall once more.

“On the twelfth of September then, Peachy. Say, that’s a cute name for you, kiddie. W’ll show them, and in the meantime Howard B. will think out some dandy surprises for his little garl.” With this he bent to kiss the olive-ivory face, but adroitly Nadine turned so that he only touched her hair. Then she ran from him up the stairs, calling archly, “I am going to rest now, and to-morrow I’ll try the new mare,” and she disappeared into the gallery above. Mr. Hopper waved to her ecstatically and then took his departure, triumph filling every inch of him.

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As soon as the other guests had gone, three disturbed people faced each other.

“What on earth is to be done?” Sir Edward said.

“It is a pretty kettle of fish, Ned,” and Lord Crombie looked at his old friend sympathetically, while Lady Crombie clasped her delicate hands. “It is not all the poor child’s fault. I am convinced that she still cares for that young man out at the mine—and all this is just bravado.” She exclaimed—“Ah! If only he had been a gentleman and all right, how fortunate it would have been, because such a nature as Nadine’s can only be influenced by love.”

“He *was* a gentleman—and all right, Viola,” Sir Edward’s voice was quite low. “The affair was one unlucky series of misunderstandings which I have only lately understood—and you really think she cares for the fellow still?” he went on and there was a shade of hope in the tone.



“I am sure of it. She admitted to me this morning that this excitement, while it did not bring happiness, helped her to forget.”

“I should prefer that she married one of her own nation. Still, Delaval was just the sort of character who would know how to deal with her and I believe he really loved her too,” and Sir Edward sighed.

“How could we communicate with him?” Lady Crombie asked eagerly, her woman’s heart touched by the thought of romance. “If he knew what she is thinking of doing he might——”

“It would be a delicate business to call him back, not knowing either of their certain views,” Lord Crombie interposed diplomatically. “You could probably elicit Nadine’s, but it would not be easy to explain things in a letter to the young man.”

“My partner Bronson is due here in the next few days, he might be able to help,” Sir Edward said. “For the moment there seems nothing to be done”—and there was a look of despair in his face. “But will you explain one thing to me, Viola. How could a girl like Nadine, who has never in her life mixed with any but gentle people, possibly contemplate marrying an intolerable cad like Mr. Howard B. Hopper? Women are incredible creatures.”

“They want love, and if they cannot have that, they are capable of every folly,” Lady Crombie answered sadly. “I will try what I can do with Nadine, and you, Ned, had better hasten Mr. Bronson’s arrival as much as you can.”

And so the three went up to dress for dinner—each feeling not very hopeful of results.

And Nadine up in her sitting-room had ordered a wood fire to be lit in the open grate—she felt so cold and strange—and there she stood looking into the crackling flames, obstinate, stubborn misery lying deep in her blue eyes.

And in a room in the house where she lived with her ultra-respectable mother—or was it aunt?—Polly was “throwing fits” with real art, and terrifying the newly made fiancé into promising her a trip to New York, and a new chincilla coat.

## CHAPTER XXIX

SOME rather belated papers came out to Rockers Point about this time, and Bayard Delaval picked one up as he was eating an early dinner in a tent hotel. His work had been very difficult and required all his intelligence—and all his wits. He had literally not had one moment to think, but underneath there was a new hope in his spirit, when he should be free he would go East and never stop until he had found his darling little girl, and told her everything which was in his heart, and then if she could forgive him. . . . Ah! That was too good to dwell upon—yet.

He was feeling particularly bright as he ate the simple food.

His eyes glanced idly over the printed words, there never was anything very interesting to be found. Suddenly a headline copied from a Washington journal struck his view—

“ Daughter of English Baronet plunges into lake at Poppa Hopper’s orgie,” and he bent forward with sudden passionate interest and apprehension to read the rest.

His face paled a little as he finished the last line. What could have happened to his refined delicate little love? Of course papers always exaggerated everything—and he cursed this wretched taste—but still the insinuation was that the whole party had been a lawless affair, and that the guests were not quite themselves.



Nadine to be among such people, and to have plunged into a lake! And who was this Hopper?—and what did it all mean?

Then he got up in rage. And here was he tied to the mine, and he should be there protecting and looking after her! What could her own people be about to let her mix with such a crew? But what change must have occurred in her. Indeed, indeed she was in need of “a master and lots of love!” He had several times noticed the wild streak in her. What if she had been so wounded to the quick by his, Bayard’s, conduct, that she had grown reckless? Oh! he could not bear it, he *must* go East at once.

He took up the paper again—it was three days old—and this party must have happened the night before—four days ago. When—when could he leave?

But it was not a question of could, he *must*. He went out of the tent rapidly. So much depended upon his full report of the new mine. If he sat up all night he could perhaps leave on the morrow. He could then be in Washington in five days, that would be the 11th of September. But to do this he must not waste one instant in thought, his whole mind must be concentrated upon the problems before him. And it was here that the strong fine character of the man showed, and the complete control he possessed over himself. Master of his iron will—for as the hours passed he did not give way to the temptation of memory or anticipation, he just doggedly stuck to his work—all that afternoon and on through the long night—and at dawn when he was drinking strong coffee to keep his mind alert—a

friend came into the shack with a telegram for him. It had come the evening before, and stayed in the rough post office.

He opened it indifferently, he often got telegrams about his work.

“Come immediately and join me, imperative. Chuck work, must be here before twelfth. Elihu Bronson, Willard Hotel, Washington, D. C.”

What had happened? Did the telegram concern the mine—or Nadine? He had finished his task in any case and now there was not one moment to be lost and even so he was not sure if he could make it before the twelfth. Only if luck was with him, and he picked up all connections. Ready money could do much—and fortunately he had thousands of dollars cash lying in the bank at Gold Stamp. In less than half an hour he was off—racing through the desert in his automobile—to find what?—heaven or hell?

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Four days of the engagement had gone by, and nothing that Lady Crombie said had had the least effect upon Nadine. She was like a block of ice generally, alternating with wild fits of gaiety. She had turned a frozen Pelham stare upon her kind hostess, which would have done justice to her father, when that lady most tactfully tried to appeal to her heart, in a suggestion that she probably did not love Mr. Hopper, and perhaps did love some one else.

“I do not understand in the least what you are

talking about," the stubborn little girl retorted loftily. "I am entirely satisfied with—Mr. Hopper"—(she could not force herself to say "Howard")—"and I am greatly looking forward to my new life, so none of you need try to dissuade me from having the smartest wedding of the year on the twelfth of this month."

"Very well, dear, there is nothing further to be done then," and Lady Crombie relapsed into silence for a while, and then talked of something else.

Eustace and Sadie had been delayed in New York, and would not arrive now until the day before the wedding, when it had been arranged that a reception should be held which should include all the Diplomatic Corps and every distinguished person in Washington at the time.

"Do not trouble much about your trousseau, Peachy," Mr. Hopper had said when he arrived the morning after the betrothal had taken place and he and his fiancée were galloping together near his home—the mare had turned out perfection, and the swift smooth paces were exalting Nadine. "You can buy anything on God's green earth you want—afterwards; let's enjoy ourselves and not waste time in fittings—and we'll go right across to Paris if they can't rig you out swell enough in New York."

"Oh, I must have clothes," Nadine said, pouting. "Now you are not to bother me at all, Howard. I shall hardly see you, I am going to be so busy with dress-makers; so you'll have to put up with it."

This she felt would be a legitimate excuse to be as little in his company as possible—until—but her mind



refused to face the picture of that! During the night after she had accepted Mr. Hopper, when she had tossed sleeplessly, she had determined that she would not let him kiss her again, even her cheek, she would be just as capricious and autocratic as Adala Meeking was to her new husband, and Sadie had counselled her was the way to treat all American men.

So she had fenced with him when he had arrived to take her for the ride, and wanted to embrace her, and finally had stamped her foot and flashed her blue eyes at him, in fierce anger, when he had tried to disobey her; and this immediately reduced him to obedience with his oft-repeated exclamation:

“Gee! You’re just great!”

Her heart felt lighter when she had satisfactorily disposed of this nightmare—for the time. The wedding ceremony would be the end of everything—she refused to think beyond that.

She had accepted his proposal solely to demonstrate that she would do as she pleased, and that no father, and no friends, should control her. She knew that she had done it all in a temper, and in desperation, but there was no going back. So she must brave it out to every one, and pretend she was triumphantly glad. And after all, Howard was so kind, and they would live too fast to think. And—what wonderful presents he was giving her and—— But as the hours passed, a secret terror grew and grew in her heart.

On the third day Mr. Bronson arrived in Washington to await Sadie and Eustace.

He came to the Crombies’ house in the afternoon

and found Lady Crombie, and her husband and Sir Edward having tea. Nadine was out with her feather-brain friends as usual. Mr. Bronson had missed seeing the announcement of the engagement in the papers, as he had been on the train, and the news of it came upon him with a shock.

“There is some one out West who will feel this as an awful blow, Sir Edward,” he said. “You know we all misjudged that young man.”

“I know it.”

“Can you do nothing, Mr. Bronson, to get him to come here in time,” Lady Crombie interrupted. “The only thing to save the poor misguided child is some one as strong and brave as young Lochinvar. I am sure she loves Mr. Delaval, but she will go through with this horrible marriage just out of obstinacy unless he comes here and prevents her. Oh! do make him, Mr. Bronson,” and her gentle voice was full of pleading. Sir Edward and Lord Crombie did not speak, but their looks were eloquent also with entreaty.

Mr. Bronson never wasted many words.

“I’ll do my darnd’st,” and he went at once to the writing-table and wrote a telegram:

“Come immediately and join me, imperative. Chuck work, must be here before twelfth. Elihu Bronson, Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C.”

“If he starts right away he’ll just make it,” he said. “I had a conversation with him in Gold Stamp ten days ago, and I have got the whole thing clear of what happened and why they parted.”

“Please do tell us.” It was Lady Crombie who

spoke, but the two elderly gentlemen were equally interested.

So Mr. Bronson, when the telegram was safely dispatched, sat down amidst the group and began. He told them the whole story as far as he knew it.

“It is just what I have lately begun to think,” Sir Edward said. It only shows how circumstantial evidence cannot always be relied on.”

“Oh, the poor, poor child,” Lady Crombie sighed. “She must not be allowed to wreck her whole life. If he does not come in time, I will brave all her wrath and tell her myself—even on the wedding day.”

“If the trains can get him across the continent, Bayard Delaval will be here,” Mr. Bronson assured them.

At that moment in Mrs. Meeking’s drawing-room, Nadine was having a clash of wills with her fiancé.

They had been left alone by the considerate hostess, and Mr. Hopper had become very affectionate, he had slipped his arm round Nadine’s waist, as they sat on the sofa, and showed every sign of demanding, and giving, further caresses.

The same strange feeling that she was betraying some trust came over Nadine, and the verses of Montrose’s love song that Bayard had sung to her returned to her memory:—

“And in the empire of thy heart,  
Where I should solely be,  
If others do pretend a part,  
Or dare to share with me;  
Or committees if thou erect,  
Or go on such a score,  
I’ll smiling mock at thy neglect,  
And never love thee more.”



Suddenly she could see Bayard as when he had sung the words, his clear-cut features, and his proudly set head, masterful and commanding, but with the eyes filled with passionate love, and the same thrill came over her as she had felt then. Indeed, indeed, he was her only love—and yet soon, perhaps in a few seconds, she would be obliged to give those sacred things, her lips which she knew should belong to love alone—to——Mr. Hopper. It was horrible, monstrous, and in seven days he would be *her husband*.

A queer sense of panic filled her. She bounded from the sofa.

“I am all nervy,” she exclaimed. “Howard don’t touch me, please, and take me home.”

Mr. Hopper saw that she was very pale. He was quite accustomed to women showing every kind of temper and caprice, and he looked upon this as only a natural manifestation of the female nature. It would be all right, when they were safely married, and he could wait until then. “Why, certainly dearie,” he agreed. “Poppa will take care of his little garl and drive her home.”

And Nadine felt grateful—and this gratitude helped her to strangle the emotion she was feeling, so that when they arrived at the Crombies’ door, she gave him her hand with more cordiality than she had ever done.

“I’m going straight to bed to-night, not to the Parker’s,” she told him. “I am dead beat.”

He did not try to dissuade her. He had been on the run himself ever since the happy affair had been announced, and an evening off strain—perhaps with Polly—would not be distasteful to him, he felt.

So Nadine crept up to her room, meeting no one as she went in, and there she opened her window and looked into the dark. The weather had grown warm again and there was just a soft breeze which lifted the tendrils of her black hair.

“Where is he?” she whispered with a sob in her voice. “My Bayard. My Knight——”

## CHAPTER XXX

THE day before the wedding of Howard B. Hopper and Nadine Pelham, was horribly wet. It poured, and the wind sighed, and it seemed as though summer was over.

Lady Crombie woke with a sense of foreboding and anxiety—would Bayard Delaval arrive in time? And if he did come, could he prevent the headstrong little girl from throwing away her life?

Howard B. Hopper woke full of triumph and security. Polly had been seen safely off to New York to bide the moment when his domestic relations should be so matured that he could slip away again from time to time and resume their agreeable acquaintance—a matter of a month or two, he fondly assured her.

Sir Edward Pelham woke an unhappy man. His guardianship of Nada's child had not been a success—and the present catastrophe was the result of it.

Nadine woke—full of wretchedness and wild rebellion. Every one had failed her, and—she had failed herself.

Every word that Bayard had ever said to her came back to her memory. How true and fine he had always been. She especially thought of the moment when he had told her of his ambition. How he would like to be so rich that he could be quite free to give his whole brain to something higher than making money—so that he could help people to get burdens off their backs—and that he could do some great work for his country.



She remembered his clear eyes looking ahead, and how she had thrilled with pride in him, and longed to be his mate and help him.

“ But if no faithless action stain  
Thy love and constant word,  
I'll make thee famous by my pen,  
And glorious by my word.  
I'll serve thee in such noble ways  
As ne'er was known before,  
I'll deck and crown thy head with bays  
And love thee more and more.”

Montrose's song rang in her head, just as it had done at Adala Meeking's. It seemed to be woven into her being like the Red Sarafane. The whole thing was so characteristic of Bayard. The strength, the pride, the realization of what true love must mean.

Bayard would have been as Montrose—and oh, the happiness to have obeyed him, and rested in his arms for ever.

What had parted them? Fate?—His fault?—Her fault?—Alas! what a cruel mystery. And instead of surrendering to divine emotion with the knowledge that they two together would climb a path to noble things—on the morrow she would have to go away alone with Howard B. Hopper whom she utterly despised—and the thought of whose kisses,—which she would then no longer be able to dodge or refuse to receive—just turned her cold and sick.

Howard B. Hopper—who had no fine aims, and would, eventually, drag her down to his level.

The poor little girl looked at herself in the glass when she got up from her bed. How changed she was since her eighteenth birthday. A sense of fear came over her. In all the wild hours she had spent since

she came to Washington—in all the nightmare of her engagement—no man had ever touched her lips. Ah! if the snake had not come, and the horses had not run away, she would have known what a real kiss meant—the kiss of love.

She quivered all over—her primitive nature thrilling with the remembrance of the few seconds when she had melted into Bayard's arms—there on the canyon. That was passion indeed—that was living—that was the fusing of mind and body and soul.

Oh! she could never, never bear that Howard B. Hopper should touch her. Then for a few minutes she lost control of herself and ran up and down the room in terror.

But Augustine entered with her dress for the reception, which had just arrived from New York. A wonderful thing of pearls and ermine—literally one mass of strings of pearls, and fat white ermine!

“Give them something to talk about, Peachy,” the proud fiancé had said, when they discussed what garment she should dazzle the Diplomatic Corps in.

“Something which shows what it cost. I'll see to the orchids—you bet,” he had added—and now it had come. Well, it was very beautiful, and very remarkable, and no one ever had such a dress before.

“My hair must be done in an old Italian way,” Nadine told Augustine. “Something like the picture of Beatrice d'Este.”

Augustine was excited at the prospect of the wedding. A husband who could give her young lady diamonds as big as nuts, and every other kind of jewel, and sables and motor-cars, was the right sort of husband

to have. Since all husbands at the end of a year or two became duties, therefore those with the wherewithal to smooth the thorny path were obviously the best kind to select.

That was Augustine's philosophy, and her insidious approval of Mr. Hopper had been some kind of comfort to Nadine.

Bayard Delaval woke in a fever of impatience, in spite of the fact that unless some accident occurred his connections were all made so that he should be in Washington by nine o'clock that evening—to find what?

Were the Pelhams leaving on the morrow, that Mr. Bronson had been so particular about his arriving on the eleventh? That was it, of course, but even if so, he could follow them to the end of the world.

There had been no announcement of the intended Hopper wedding in the Western papers, and he had been too centred upon his own thoughts, in any case, to have looked for anything in particular. Once his iron will no longer imposed banishment upon all memory of Nadine, it seemed as though the floodgates of his pent-up emotions were opened, and the tide of passion swept all before it. His whole being was submerged in it. His thoughts never left the little olive-ivory face, and his temples throbbed with the longing for her. A fierceness was in him, he desired to crush her in his arms, to seize her and carry her off for his very own, away from all the world. For the first time in his life he knew the whole delirium of love.

And so the hours passed.

Nadine had asked her fiancé not to come and see her during the day. She must be with her family, she



had assured him, but she never left her room all the morning, and had her lunch served in her sitting-room, and then deliberately composed herself for sleep. She was worn out with excitement and fatigue. Presents were arriving all the time—but she had ceased to take any interest in them. She had passed beyond the stage when they could give her any pleasure. She seemed to be obsessed with only one thought—one hideous vision—the moment when she must let Howard B. Hopper kiss her. The picture of the honeymoon with him was so awful that she could not face it, and yet she knew that she was not strong enough to break away now at the last moment—and stand the scandal and the reproaches of her friends—and the triumph of her father. She had not the courage. She was just beaten on all sides.

Augustine brought her up some camomile tea, and it soothed her, and at last she slept until late in the afternoon.

Lady Crombie had not gone near her—of what use? If Bayard Delaval did not arrive to-night, then she would speak out, but at present the less she irritated the excited headstrong child, the better.

Just before dinner Mr. Bronson telephoned that he had received a wire from the eagerly expected young man. It was to say that if he caught the last connection all right, he would be at the hotel by nine o'clock.

The poor lady breathed a sigh of relief and went to impart the good news to her husband and Sir Edward.

There was a dinner-party before the reception. Mr. Hopper arrived in good time, just as Nadine was coming down the stairs to go into the great *salon*. She

made a beautiful picture as she descended the steps in her altogether marvellous dress. Its train of pearls bordered with wide ermine travelling behind her and a great bunch of orchids at her waist, while her black hair was done in an eccentric fashion rather high, with isolated pearl hairpins keeping it in place.

“Peachy, you’re a queen,” the enamoured Hopper said; passionate admiration in his dissipated eyes.

Fortunately for Nadine, servants were crossing the hall, or nothing could have kept him within the prescribed bounds.

Sir Edward had avoided meeting his future son-in-law as much as possible, and had left the lawyer to make all arrangements as to settlements. His pride insisting upon Nadine’s money being settled upon herself, and declining any provision from Mr. Hopper.

“Let him give her what he likes afterwards,” Sir Edward said to Lord Crombie; “but with my consent she shall not receive a dollar from the bounder.”

These days had been one continual gall to him. When Nadine entered the *salon*, there was a murmur of admiration, and it gave her courage. She had been feeling that she would just have to give up and stay hiding in her room.

All the most charming people in Washington were assembled, and Howard B. Hopper beamed with delighted triumph. These interesting and refined countrymen and women of his had not hitherto looked upon him with too gracious eyes.

And so the hour when fate intended to strike again grew *nearer*.

## CHAPTER XXXI

MR. HOPPER had partaken of two or three cocktails as he dressed for this momentous occasion—so that the first glasses of champagne he drank at dinner began to affect his head, and Nadine who sat next to him, was wise enough now in the ways of the people she had gone out among to understand this, and what would probably be its consequence. A sickening sense of disgust and shame invaded her. Here, before they had reached the entrées, the man who would be *her husband* on the morrow was becoming intoxicated, in a company composed of the élite of American and cosmopolitan society in Washington. People who did not indulge in this way, and who would have scant tolerance for anyone who did.

Suddenly the poor child realized the vulgarity and licence of the set she had been consorting with and the strong influence they had had upon her—for she—who had never seen or heard before of people being tipsy in her short, sheltered life—had become so hardened that the sight of wildly excited girls and incoherent young men had grown not to shock her.

And after to-morrow she would not only have the disgrace to bear of seeing Howard noisy and boisterous at dinner; but she would have to go home alone with him afterwards, when he would probably be quite drunk.

She put down her glass without tasting it, she had become very pale.

Her fiancé for his part was in a seventh heaven,



his natural insolent self-assurance, exaggerated by what he had imbibed, was more blatant than it had ever been.

Nadine nearly went into a fit of hysterical laughter when she caught sight of the face of an exquisite old American lady—one of Washington's greatest hostesses, who was seated at his other side. Disgust and contempt, and freezing hauteur were stamped upon her delicate features, as Mr. Hopper made one ill-timed joke after another, and through the flowers she could see Eustace across the table—who had arrived that afternoon with his bride—and was there *pity* in his cold eyes?

This fired her. She could not bear pity—pity from Eustace!

So she controlled her anguish of shame and disgust, and deliberately drew her fiancé into conversation.

“Howard,” she whispered, “promise me you will not drink anything more this evening. If you do, I'll go straight up to my room.”

An ugly look came into his face, his coarse mouth set.

“Now, don't be up-stage, Peachy,” he retorted. “Why, what's come to you?”

That terrible cold, empty sinking beneath the heart was growing and growing in Nadine. She felt as though she could not bear anything further.

The important personage who sat on her other side, fortunately then engaged her in conversation. He felt commiseration for the poor little girl, too, but tried not to show it.

And so the dinner passed and the reception began. Sadie came up to Nadine as soon as they had left

the table. She was looking radiant, and had already, with that marvellous adaptability which is one of the great qualities of American women, begun to adopt the Pelham air of dignity.

“How much more suitable to papa she is than I am,” Nadine thought instantly—and pain grew. Sadie was on firm ground and would be honoured and respected—and she—where was she drifting to?

Sadie was charming and tactful as usual, she had heard all about the situation from her father, and knew that it would be wiser to let Nadine see that she did not think she had caught a gold fish in Mr. Hopper, so that she might not have any support to lean upon; and at the end of a ten minutes' conversation, without antagonizing her, she had let Nadine feel that she thought she was going to commit a desperate mistake in marrying the millionaire.

Nadine was at breaking-point almost. Visions of Europe came to her. How could she ever be seen with Howard there—and New York's best would not be likely to receive him either—in spite of his dollars—since it was plain to be seen that Washington's best was not accepting him graciously. Instead of a gilded existence ahead, she would have to surmount difficulties—she, Nadine Pelham! But worse, much worse than all that, was the thought that he **WOULD BE HER HUSBAND.**

Ah! how much better to have stayed in the Gold Rock hotel with Bayard, or have lived in his shack, and tried to learn to cook, and keep house for him, surrounded by fond love and care—than to have luxury and disgust and misery.

The younger people had begun to dance in the large music room, and the rest of the company filled the great hall, and the galleries above.

Nadine had just been introduced by Lady Crombie to an English woman who was passing—and they had walked on into a little room beyond the staircase together. While Mr. Hopper took this opportunity of going to the smoking-room to have a drink with the few men of his own set who were at the party.

Sir Edward and Lord Crombie walked apart. “How I hope to God Delaval will arrive in time,” the distracted parent said; and at that moment both men’s eyes caught sight of Mr. Bronson—and yes—Bayard Delaval coming from the entrance hall.

“If Bronson has not told him of to-morrow’s wedding, don’t enlighten him, Ned,” Lord Crombie urged. “Let him see her first and let them both get the shock, it will be much more effective.” Sir Edward nodded and they went to meet the two men.

Bayard had not asked Mr. Bronson any questions when he saw that he did not mean to be communicative. The cautious nature of the astute mine-owner made him decide not to interfere.

“I am glad you are in time, Delaval,” he had said; “and I will leave it to you to grasp the situation—hustle dressing.”

And they had spoken of the mine on their way to the Crombies’ house.

Sir Edward stepped behind Lord Crombie after they all shook hands, and then he came forward and drew Bayard aside.

“I want to apologize to you, Mr. Delaval,” he said,



“for the attitude that I took up in the past. I allowed prejudice and circumstantial evidence to cloud my judgment. I am truly sorry that I did you that great injustice.”

“It was to your daughter you did the wrong, sir,” Bayard answered. “It is to her that the apology is due. I understand that things looked ugly to you, but I can’t understand how you showed so little confidence in your own dear little girl.”

Sir Edward’s eyes filled with pain.

“I had reason to fear the heredity in her—it had been my constant concern, and what I saw appeared the confirmation of my worst fears; but I was indeed wrong, and I am truly sorry.”

“Have you explained to Nadine?”

“Alas! I have lost all influence with my daughter.” At that moment two personages of the Mission passed, and stopped to converse with Sir Edward, and Bayard Delaval moved on, only concerned with the finding of Nadine as soon as possible.

Lady Crombie chanced upon him as he made his way through the vast throng accompanied by Mr. Bronson, and she stopped and was most gracious when Mr. Bronson introduced him. Then she drew them tactfully towards the door of the little alcove. There he would be sure to catch sight of Nadine beyond talking to the English woman, she thought. Then she pretended to point out some mutual friends to Mr. Bronson, so that Bayard might go on alone.

“He is perfectly charming, your young man,” she exclaimed as the tall figure moved forward. “How I do trust it will be all right!”

Bayard caught sight of Nadine before she saw him. He had thought that he could not feel more intensely than he had already felt concerning her in his life, but the wave of emotion which swept over him surpassed anything he had ever experienced. He looked long and took in the dress, and the jewels, and the whole allure. How infinitely changed had she become—his darling little love.

But if fault there was, it was his, and no one's else, and his must be the task to alter her again.

His eyes, burning with passionate love, were fixed upon the little face when she suddenly looked up and saw him.

She drew in her breath with a sharp hiss, and the English woman, seeing that something unusual was about to occur between these two young people, walked through on into the conservatory, leaving Nadine alone.

“How do you do, Mr. Delaval?”

“How are you, Miss Pelham?”

This is the way that they greeted one another after all these days.

“You—you've come from the mine?” Nadine's voice was hoarse, and, in the strange way unimportant trifles seem to register at thrilling moments, her eyes were taking in how well Bayard looked in evening dress—that acid test of a gentleman, as her father had always said. Well, there was no doubt about Bayard's status! All the assumed carelessness of the mining engineer's rough garments had departed, and before her stood a distinguished man of the world, like her father, or Eustace, or any of the Cabinet Ministers, or

the men who belonged to this Washington set which Howard B. Hopper did *not* adorn!

All the more credit to him to work, if he was very poor, and a gentleman. But she felt that she would not care had he been a beggar in the street! He was her love! This thought flashed instantaneously—and a wild adoration filled her.

“Yes, I’ve come from the mine, and I am so awfully glad to see you again.” He took her hand now, and shook it, and he held the little soft fingers tight. “Nadine, oh, I have longed for this moment. We have so much to explain to each other. . . .” And he bent and looked into her eyes, his filled with fond tenderness.

Across the hall in the smoking-room Mr. Howard B. Hopper was drinking his own health with three or four hilarious friends whom he had collected. They had been chaffing him about the state of a Benedict—and how would it fit in with his affair with Polly? His tongue went into his cheek—as he drank to his last night’s freedom, and his morrow’s bondage.

“Not much!” he assured the boys. “Guess I’ll keep both.”

And this was greeted with a roar of appreciation.

Then this immaculate fiancé came rapidly back to find Nadine, and arrived on the instant that Bayard held her hand.

He was rather too drunk to take in the whole meaning of their two faces, but he did grasp that here was a fellow turning a soft eye upon *his* property. So he slipped his arm familiarly into Nadine’s and said boisterously:

“I’m back, Peachy.”



Bayard's eyes flashed grey fire. Who was this impossible beast?

Nadine went white as her pearl dress.

"Introduce me, sweetie," Mr. Hopper hiccupped.

"This is my fiancé—Mr. Hopper—Mr. Delaval"—the poor child blurted out.

Bayard's habit of self-control served him, but the blood left his face: "You—are going to be married?" he gasped.

Nadine could not speak for a moment, she nodded—and then, "Yes—to-morrow," she whispered brokenly.

Bayard was stunned. "Allow me to congratulate you," he said with withering iciness, stepping back a pace. Mr. Hopper grasped who he was.

"Say, we'll be husbands-in-law," he laughed thickly, enchanted at being able to get off this joke—and he came forward, and thrust out his right hand, and with the other slapped Bayard's shoulder.

Nadine's little face was piteous, her strange blue eyes were filled with a world of misery and rebellion, and despair. But Bayard was too stunned to be moved by their message. How dared they bring him here to learn this?

The worst part of his nature came uppermost, he bowed sarcastically and taking Nadine's hand in mock homage:

"I hope you will be as happy as I had thought to make you, Miss Pelham," he said; and then he dropped it, and turned upon his heel.

Thus does wounded pride make fools of us all and cause us often to lose that which we most desire in life.

## CHAPTER XXXII

**B**AYARD strode through the hall, never looking back or noticing the crowd. He passed various old friends of his quite close, but did not even perceive them. They looked after him and wondered at his grim set face.

“Why, that’s Bayard Delaval,” some said. “What is he doing here. Was he not the hero of this English girl’s escapade out West?”

Heads were put together.

Bayard recked not of the gossip. A mad rage was holding him. What was the meaning of it all? They had deliberately brought him back from Nevada knowing that on the morrow Nadine was to wed this incredible brute. What was his name? Hopper. Hopper—that was the man who had given the party at which Nadine had created such a talk. Then blind fury shook him, his thoughts became incoherent; he just wanted to curse every one concerned. Reason had ceased to work. He passed into the outer hall, and secured his hat and coat. He would return to the *Willard*, and catch the express to New York. Hell, he felt, was the place he would have wished to book for!

Nadine, left alone with her fiancé, staggered for a second. . . . He had returned—her Knight Bayard—returned not knowing she was going to be married—and he had said there were things to explain. Oh, the agony of it! And he was more attractive than ever, and she loved him wildly, and he had gone—where?

Perhaps to find Sadie? Where? Where? She did not hear Mr. Hopper speaking to her, or notice that he had put his hand round her shoulder. Her eyes were straining not to lose sight of Bayard's tall figure disappearing in the crowd.

She took a step forward, and from there she could see that he was making for the entrance hall.

He was going away—out of her life, and she would never see him again! All the wild passions of her nature surged up. She flung the fat hand off her shoulder, and hissed at her fiancé, showing all her strong white teeth—and if her father had been there, he would have seen the vision all over again of Nada biting her gipsy master's arm.

Howard B. Hopper stood back completely cowed for the moment, he had never seen anything so fierce as this in his life.

“Get out of my sight,” Nadine whispered hoarsely, “I want to be alone.”

And she started forward determined to gain her room.

She almost rushed through the crowd to the staircase—Mr. Hopper following her. She passed the couples on the landing where the stairs divided, and at last reached the gallery, and went through the velvet curtains to the corridor, where her sitting-room and bedroom were.

“Nadine! Peachy!” the perturbed fiancé called in vain. For when she had gained the sitting-room she slammed the door in his face.

He swore aloud and knocked on the panel, but the key turned in the lock, and that was all the answer he



received. So he bit his fingers through his glove—he would have bitten his nails if he could. Then he went back again into the gallery to think.

There it seemed that another drink would be the only thing to clear his head, so he returned to the refreshment room below in search of one.

Nadine after she had locked the door walked up and down the room.

No. No pain she had yet been made to suffer equalled the pain of this.

To have seen him once more, and to have lost him again. She *would not* bear it. She stopped in her restless pacing, which suggested some wild thing resenting its cage. She leaned against the table which held the lamp, she felt almost faint, and her eye caught sight of *The Story of Bayard* which lay there under some other books.

She picked it up.

Her Knight! She opened the leaves and took out the snap-shot that she had taken of Bayard at Albuquerque. It was rather a bad photograph—but it was he. She kissed it fondly and pressed it to her bare neck. Then her brain began to work.

He must be staying in Washington? Where? With friends? What friends? She began her excited pacing again. Perhaps he was at an hotel? Which one? She rushed over to the telephone and picked up the book. Her hands were shaking so she could hardly hold it.

She found the number of the *Shoreham*, but it seemed long before the answer came. No, there was no Mr. Delaval staying there.

She looked up the *Willard*. If he was at an hotel

at all he must be at either of these two. Would he have had time to have returned there though?

Yes, it was not very far off.

At last she got the connection. Yes, the telephone clerk said, Mr. Delaval was staying there. No, he was not in his room.

At that very moment Bayard was taking his key from the reception clerk and going towards the lift.

“Oh, please ring again up to his apartment,” Nadine cried, and the obliging girl rang and rang.

Bayard heard the last sound as he opened his door. But before he could get to the instrument the clerk had rung off, and was answering Nadine from below.

“No reply from Mr. Delaval’s room.”

Bayard called down. “There was some one ringing when I came in.”

“Yes, but the party’s gone, Mr. Delaval,” came the answer, “and we don’t know the number to call.”

Who could be ringing him? It did not strike him that it might be Nadine. He had many friends in Washington. He flung his hat and coat down on the bed, and then he put on a smoking-jacket, and began rapidly to pack. Only a few moments passed, however, before his well-trained reason commenced to reassert itself. . . . There must have been some method in what looked like Mr. Bronson’s madness? Could it have been that he hoped that he, Bayard would be in time to prevent this awful crime?

Nadine had not looked so very happy about it. Indeed, now he could think more clearly, there had been anguish in her eyes. Had he failed her again through his temper and his pride?

He stopped dead short in his folding of a coat.

The marriage was not accomplished yet, and there would still be time to take her away consenting—or unconsenting, he added with clenched teeth! He would save her—save her from that ugly fate, and hold her for his own.

There was the midnight train to Wilmington, and there a licence could be obtained in an hour or so, and she should be his wife on the morrow—not Hopper's. He was himself at last—and a ruler, and he would claim the woman who was made to be his mate! Now what would be the best way to carry out his plan?

He had been worse than a fool to go off in a rage. The reception would certainly continue for two hours longer. He would dress again and return there, and find his beloved, and make her come away with him—now, this very night!

He had just begun to take off his smoking-coat when there was a knock at the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Nadine heard the telephone girl's final answer she dropped the instrument in despair. Then she threw everything to the winds. She would go and find him—she would wait at the *Willard* until he did come in. What did she care for anything more in the world! She rushed into her bedroom and seized a fur cloak—it was of soft dark mink and completely enveloped her. Her father had given it to her only that morning. She would not touch the Hopper magnificence. She peeped cautiously into the passage. There was no one in sight. She would get away down the side staircase, and out at a side door. Round in that street the motors would be waiting. Adala Meeking's chauffeur would know her, she could call him at once.



Mr. Hopper, fortified by a strong whisky, had come up again to wait outside Nadine's door—and he caught sight of the cloak and the back of her head going down the passage as he came through the curtains. He rushed back, he would face her on the ground floor by going round the other way, so he hurried down the main staircase and through the company with scant ceremony, but a friend caught him here and there, and he did not reach the side entrance, after having secured his hat and coat, in time to circumvent Nadine. He saw her get into Adala Meeking's motor before he could enter his own.

Where was she going? To the Meeking house? He'd know! She shouldn't put anything over on him!

So he gave orders for his Pierce-Arrow to follow the other car, and then he swore as only he could swear.

Nadine, crouching back on the cushions of her friend's coupé, only knew one thought—one wild determined thought:

Bayard. To go to Bayard!

She had never been to an hotel alone in her life, and it was now past eleven o'clock. She was beyond timidity though. She walked boldly up to the desk and asked the number of Mr. Delaval's room. The clerk gave it, and she went straight to the lift, her heart beating to suffocation when she reached the suite, down the long passage, the little page preceding her; she called the boy and gave him a dollar, and told him to go. Then she paused a moment, and then knocked at the door. Bayard pulled his smoking-coat on again and went and opened it.

Who could it be at this time of night?

Then when he saw who it was: "Nadine!" he cried, overcome with mad joy.

"My darling! My darling child," and she was in his strong arms, clasped close to him. But just as it had been on the canyon, before his lips could meet hers—an interruption came—and this time a doubly unwelcome one in the person of Howard B. Hopper, who had followed on the heels of his fleeting fiancée, and had come up in the very next lift.

Jealous rage convulsed his coarse face, but his early business training told him that the show down had come, and that he would not emerge triumphant from the situation, so he had better make the best of it, and secure what advantage he could.

Bayard held Nadine with one arm and faced this intruder fiercely.

"Well," Mr. Hopper drawled insolently. "I guess all I'll get is the ring!"

Nadine drew herself up, and took the huge diamond from her finger, and handed it to him.

"Oh, I am so sorry, Mr. Hopper," she cried.

He took the ring with a sardonic smile. "Yes—you are!" he hurled at her—and then he went out banging the door!

And so they were alone once more, these two who had loved and been severed and now met again after much pain.

"Never to part any more," Bayard said, when he could speak, for a moment or so after Mr. Hopper had left them, the mad joy of holding his little sweetheart—of pressing passionate kisses upon her warm young lips—had blotted out all else.

“No, never any more,” Nadine responded ecstatically. “Here I am, and here I am going to stay; I am not going back to-night, or ever again—I am yours.”

“Honey—Sweetheart — Wife!” Bayard cried wildly and strained her again to his heart.

Then they sat down upon the hard sofa still clasped close, and told each other everything, and when there was not a single shadow between them, they began to make a plan.

“We will go right back to your shack, and I will learn to cook and keep house for you, Bayard, and be a real miner’s wife,” Nadine said fondly, rubbing her cheek up and down his coat, in the way she had done when she was unknowing, as they drove back to the Justice of the Peace, in the dawn.

And her words gave a great thrill to Bayard! Here would be a chance of testing her love, and then revelling in its glory! It had always been a thought of his that he would not tell her that he had riches as great as anything she had known. She would come away with him thinking she was going to the hard life at the mine!

“You are not afraid of the future with me, are you sweetheart?” he asked; but there was no anxiety in his tone.

“Afraid?—of course not! It is you who should be afraid of having such a bad cook!”

“Do you think we shall have to get married again?” she went on. “I seem to have taken a horror for rings and ceremonies and things like that!”

He held her to him fondly.

“Even hairpin rings!” and with an air of masterfulness, as though he had a right to touch his own



property, he pulled one of the pearl-topped pins out of her hair. She nestled up to him, and gave him her tiny hand. That tiny, rather helpless hand which always drew him so strongly! He twisted the wire up, leaving the pearl as a stone.

Nadine watched him.

He slipped the grotesque gage on her small left third finger, and she kissed it as though it had been the rarest jewel!

“Are we married now?” she asked. Her eyes intoxicated him. His voice was a little deeper as he answered:

“No, not yet; we shan’t be actually married until I take you home.”

“Where’s home?” But she was playing with his hair now, and beginning all the maddening little love caresses which she had given him the night in the shack. He felt that he must use all his self-control to be able to carry out the vow which he had made in the Gold Rock Hotel.

Only when all circumstances should be perfection should their honeymoon begin. Now they must talk sensibly, as there was very little time.

“Home is just a little old house down in Virginia, not two hundred miles from here. We will go there first, before we go back to the mine.”

“Yes.” Nadine would willingly have gone to Timbuctoo—or the infernal regions—had he suggested it. For her everything he said and did was *right*. The primitive gipsy part of her had found a master at last! A master whom she adored and was determined never to leave again.

“ There is a place called Wilmington where you can get a licence in a minute almost, we must catch the one o'clock express—we shall be there in the morning and have the knot tied—then we'll head back here and go on to Beechwood in Virginia—my funny old bit of a barn—and there, beloved darling, we'll have the realest honeymoon two lovers ever had! The maples will all be turning, and the beeches too! You can't think what the colours are down there!”

Nadine's blue eyes were like liquid stars suffused with passionate love.

She never thought to ask a question as to what she was to do about her clothes to go away in! From now onward she would never have to settle anything for herself again. Oh, the bliss of it!

“ There will be no time for you to go back and change, honey,” Bayard said in a minute or two, because coherent conversation was so often interrupted by caresses! “ We shall have to go straight to the station from here. What will you do about a hat? The cloak's all right, it will be fine.”

“ I'll think—while you go and pay your bill and order a taxi ”—joyous anticipation was in her tone.

“ Yes, and I must do some telephoning downstairs,” he told her. “ Now I hate to leave you even for these few minutes. If anyone comes to the door when I am away, don't open it. I will be as quick as I can.”

If Nadine could have heard what the telephone messages were she would have been greatly surprised; but she was too busy arranging a head-gear to think of anything else. When Bayard left her she began searching among his things on the dressing-table for a pair of scissors and some pins. These found, she deliberately

cut off the fat piece of ermine which had been on her train, and all the strings of pearls which were fastened to it spread about the floor! Trifles like that did not trouble her.

With deft fingers she twisted the lovely white fur into a toque; then she pulled down the elaborate Italian coiffure and coiled her black curls into their own simple knot. The cunning little hat was immensely becoming. Then she cut off the second row of ermine—and more pearls strewed the floor—and now her dress was trainless, and would be entirely hidden by the coat. The second bit of the fur she fastened round her bare throat. And when the mink wrap was on, and pulled round her childish figure, nothing more attractive as a bride to go away with could have been imagined for a man! There only remained her silver and pearl slippers, with their four-inch heels, which were rather remarkable! But people did wear such odd things nowadays—perhaps these would not be too noticeable after all! She pranced up and down delightedly in front of the pier-glass fixed in the wardrobe door.

And below, her lover was telephoning to the Crombies' house. He first spoke to Mr. Bronson, who fortunately happened to have been near, and came at once to the phone.

“I don't know what you brought me here for, except to do what I have done in any case! Nadine and I are making a bolt of it to Wilmington and will be married in the morning. When we are safely off, let the family know.” This was the substance of his communication, and Elihu Bronson gave a delighted reply. Then Bayard asked if he could speak to Augustine—and his



orders to her were precise. She was to proceed in the morning—and he told her the train to Beechwood, Warrington, Virginia, with Miss Pelham's things. "Have her loveliest outfit laid out for to-morrow night for dinner. She will arrive about six in the evening and will be Mrs. Bayard Delaval by that time!"

Augustine nearly shrieked with surprise.

"And above all not one word to anyone. You understand!"

The romance of the thing delighted the maid, and Monsieur Delaval was after all a *bel homme*—and Monsieur Hopper, however rich, could never have been called a gentleman! and she could understand any young lady being in love with Monsieur Delaval—and no one knew better than she did that her mistress had always had a *béguin* that way! And her church did not approve of divorces even among these Protestants—so—it was all for the best in the end! The *Bon Dieu* satisfied, and every one besides! She would not breathe a word, and she would be there!

The telephoning completed, a telegram was sent to a certain widowed aunt, and a certain silver-haired gentleman—with the address of Beechwood, Virginia.

"Am bringing you my bride to-morrow night, will wire train. Make us a great reception. Love. Bayard."

Now all would be in readiness, and he would only have to keep up the bluff for eighteen hours more—and then! Well, it was just too divine to think about! And having paid his bill, and ordered the taxi, he returned to his little girl.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

A CRY of surprised delight came from Bayard when he caught sight of Nadine in her travelling costume, and there had to be so many kisses, and such delightful things said, that it was a wonder that they did not miss the train.

Bayard had his own packing to do, and delicious as Nadine's help was, it did not accelerate matters!

But at last they were at the station. The hotel had sent on a porter to get their places. A drawing-room was out of the question at the last moment like that, one upper, and one lower berth, but not under the same pair of green curtains, had been the only possible things to secure! Nadine was convulsed with laughter about it all. So she would sleep in that way she had thought so very comic on their journey to Chicago—from New York, and it was a fat motherly female who would have the berth over her, and not Bayard! Well, never mind! It all added to the fun of the thing. She was not going to make any difficulties—and allowed herself to be conducted there by the darkie porter, and then said good-night to her Beloved—and crawled into bed!

She did not dare to undress, but just lay there in her fur coat.

Oh! the joy, joy, joy, of everything! And she must get accustomed to travelling with the masses—since she was only going to be a mining engineer's wife. For of course now her father would not give her all the quantity of money she had had, ever since she had been in Washington. They would have to live on Bayard's salary, which probably could not be very much. There

was not a doubt or fear in her heart. The shack on the mountain-side seemed to her fond imagination all that she could desire—since it would be *his* and *hers*—alone! No regrets for past luxury came to her—and very soon, tired out with excitement and happiness, the thick black lashes rested on her flushed cheeks, and she was in the land of blissful dreams.

\* \* \* \* \*

And so they were married next morning at Wilmington and were once more on the train on their way back to Virginia.

And what fun it had all been! Bayard had purposely kept things as light and gay as possible. He would not allow himself to be sentimental or give himself too much opportunity to make love. All that must be for the afterwards—when they had arrived safely at his home. And so for their breakfast they had joked like two school children. And even during the ceremony they had hardly been serious—Nadine insisting upon their using the hairpin pearl ring.

But as they came out, and back into the taxi which waited for them, she whispered to her newly made husband:

“ Bayard, the first money that we can save up you shall buy me a little narrow sapphire one, like Sadie has in diamonds. But I did not feel I would be really married to you without this dear old wire thing! ”

He held her little hand to his arm very tightly, but he did not speak then.

He purposely did not try to engage a drawing-room for the return journey—which was by day. She must think he was not rich enough. So they went straight to the station after the wedding and in the train they sat among all the other people on the straight-up seats.



The weather had grown hot again, and Nadine was almost suffocated in the fur coat, which she did not dare to take off or show too much of her magnificent pearl dress.

She grew very tired at last—and went to sleep up against Bayard's shoulder.

He held her with his arm—and the tenderest love filled him. Here was triumph for a man! She was coming away with him apparently to a life in the wilds of hardship, and she had only seemed to think it was all perfect joy!

And so the day passed.

And towards sunset they reached their destination. And then at the little station a motor was waiting for them.

“Sent by a friend of mine!” Bayard said.

All this country was so beautiful with the turning autumn tints—and they got into the car and lay back in the comfortable seats. The darkie driver was a new man, and had not known Bayard before, so there were no effusive greetings as would certainly have been the case had he been one of the Beechwood old retainers.

“How divine it all is, isn't it!” Nadine exclaimed. “And don't you think perhaps as we pass through the town we had better stop and buy me a frock, and some shoes, Bayard? I could not help you much in any work in this when we get to the barn.” He clasped her tight. Every proof of her love and confidence in him was making him feel more deeply. Ah! what would it be like when he could let himself go, and tell her of all the wild passion he felt!

“Oh, to-morrow will be time enough for that, honey. I want to go straight on this evening—so as

to show you the view from the crest of the hill before the light goes.”

It was always only to do what Bayard wanted which pleased Nadine. If he preferred her in her pearl gown for their first evening alone, that was just as it should be. And no doubt he could lend her a pajama suit to sleep in! And then she remembered with an unpleasant twinge the pink silk garments of Mr. Howard B. Hopper! and suddenly she buried her face against Bayard's shoulder.

“Oh, I have such a lot of stupid things to tell you that I did when I was unhappy,” she whispered. But he bent down and kissed her; they had come into the beech woods now skirting the little town.

“I do not want to know of them, sweetheart; whatever you did, was my fault for leaving you all alone.”

“Well, there is one thing I never did, Bayard—I never let Mr. Hopper kiss me—only my cheek the first day when he asked me to marry him. I always felt even through everything that I only belonged to you.”

“My darling, my little girl—and once I swore that I should be your only love—and that if a man could hold a woman I would hold Nadine—and then I let wounded vanity take you from me. But it has not been for long!”

“And I have never loved anyone else in all my life—and I have never ceased to love you, and I never shall!”

\* \* \* \* \*

They came to the crest of the hill presently from whence Beechwood could be seen, and when they reached the curve Bayard made the chauffeur stop the car, and he lifted Nadine down.

“ I want you to come with me along the path, honey, and I will show you our home.”

She clung to him gladly—full of interest and excitement. And when they passed beyond the turn, and out of sight of the darkie, Bayard picked her up and carried her—her tiny feet in their silver and pearl slippers were hardly suited to the rough road.

He clasped her like a baby, her light weight as nothing in his strong arms, and in a minute they reached an old fence, with a tree stump beside it, and on this he set her down, and stood with his arm round her as she sat there.

It was an exquisite view which their eyes gazed upon. Sheer down below a deep valley filled with beeches, just beginning to turn towards gold, and up on the opposite hill the top of a big old rambling white southern house could be seen—nestling in what looked to English eyes to be park-like land.

But nearer the valley, and in the middle distance, a little negro shanty jutted out—with a shingle lean-to at its side.

Bayard pointed before him with his free hand—the other was holding her to him.

“ There is my home.”

Nadines eyes were fixed on the shanty which she thought he meant. And for one single instant she felt a faint shock and then, she put out her arms and encircled his neck.

“ Bayard, I am glad it is so tiny—I love you—I love you—and you must teach me how to keep it, and how to make you happy there, my darling one.”

He saw in an instant her mistake. He had not meant to deceive her. This had been the moment he had been waiting for, when he should have the joy of showing



her his home—but now it was augmented a hundredfold.

Here she was willing to go and live with him—fond and loving and contented—in Uncle Ephraim's cabin!—and after Pelham Court! This was love indeed—no man could crave for more!

He framed her little olive-ivory face in his hands and looked deep into her blue eyes. And his own filled with moisture, so great was his emotion.

“My God!” he whispered worshippingly. “Nadine—My soul.”

And then their lips met in a long, long kiss of rapture.

“Come,” he said a few moments after, “we must be getting on.”

And he picked her up in his arms again to carry her back to the car.

But looking over his shoulder Nadine exclaimed:

“There's smoke coming out of the chimney, Bayard. Is some one there?”

“Yes, they will be preparing supper for us. Come along!”

And then they laughed joyously when they were in the car.

The coloured chauffeur took them at a great pace now, and in a minute or two they seemed to be sweeping through white-painted open gates, and up a gravel drive, bordered by giant beech trees.

“But Bayard, isn't he going the wrong way? Oh!”

For they had come round a bend and were at the front door of a great white house in the old colonial style.

And standing under the portico were a stately old lady and gentleman, and behind them a group of old darkie servants grinning with joy.

Nadine clung to her husband timidly she was over-

come with the surprise. But what a welcome they had! And how delightful the old hall looked with its great open fireplace filled with blazing logs. And how courtly the greeting of the splendid old southern gentleman to his new daughter-in-law!

“We’ve had runaway marriage, Aunt Sylvia,” Bayard said, laughing joyously. “See, Nadine is still in her swell party clothes!”

Such delight to all concerned! And Nadine was embraced and laughed over—and then, with Bayard’s arm around her, she was taken through the hall, amidst the bowing merry servants, up the broad old stairs and to a room all dear old chintzes and old mahogany furniture polished for a hundred years by willing darkie hands. And it all smelt of roses and lavender, for great bouquets of both flowers were there.

And out on the bed was laid Nadine’s loveliest tea-gown, and all her finest under-things—and beyond in the bathroom she could see Augustine pouring the scent into her bath!

“Oh, Bayard, I am so happy—so happy!” she cried tremulously. “But I would have loved you just the same had it been only the shack.”

“And now we are really married,” he said as he held her to his heart—wild passion in his eyes. “And I will show you how I adore you, darling little girl. How I worship your trust and belief in me—My honey—My little Queen!”

And then he sang softly the end of Montrose’s song:

“I’ll serve thee in such noble ways  
As ne’er was known before;  
I’ll deck and crown thy head with bays  
And love thee more and more!”

THE END







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