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THE HERITAGE OF DEDLOW MARSH, ETC.

BY

BRET HARTE.

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

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THE HERITAGE OF DEDLOW MARSH

AND OTHER TALES

BY

BRET HARTE,
AUTHOR OF "THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP," ETC.

AUTHORIZED EDITION.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1890.

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THE

HERITAGE OF DEDLOW MARSH.

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I.

THE sun was going down on the Dedlow Marshes. The tide was following it fast, as if to meet the reddening lines of sky and water in the west, leaving the foreground to grow blacker and blacker every moment, and to bring out in startling contrast the few half-filled and half-lit pools left behind, and forgotten. The strong breath of the Pacific fanning their surfaces at times kindled them into a dull glow like dying embers. A cloud of sand-pipers rose white from one of the nearer lagoons, swept in a long eddying ring against the sunset, and became a black and dropping rain to seaward. The long sinuous line of channel, fading with the light and ebbing with the tide, began to give off here and

there light puffs of gray-winged birds like sudden exhalations. High in the darkening sky the long arrow-headed lines of geese and "brant" pointed towards the upland. As the light grew more uncertain the air at times was filled with the rush of viewless and melancholy wings, or became plaintive with far-off cries and lamentations. As the Marshes grew blacker the far-scattered tussocks and accretions on its level surface began to loom in exaggerated outline, and two human figures, suddenly emerging erect on the bank of the hidden channel, assumed the proportion of giants.

When they had moored their unseen boat, they still appeared for some moments to be moving vaguely and aimlessly around the spot where they had disembarked. But as the eye became familiar with the darkness it was seen that they were really advancing inland, yet with a slowness of progression and deviousness of course that appeared inexplicable to the distant spectator. Presently it was evident that this seemingly even, vast, black expanse was traversed and intersected by inky creeks and small channels, which made human progression difficult and dangerous. As they appeared nearer, and their figures took more natural proportions, it could be seen that each carried a gun; that one was a young

girl, although dressed so like her companion in shaggy pea-jacket and sou'wester as to be scarcely distinguished from him above the short skirt that came half way down her high india-rubber fishing boots. By the time they had reached firmer ground, and turned to look back at the sunset, it could be also seen that the likeness between their faces was remarkable. Both had crisp, black, tightly curling hair. Both had dark eyes and heavy eyebrows. Both had quick vivid complexions, slightly heightened by the sea and wind. But more striking than their similarity of colouring was the likeness of expression and bearing. Both wore the same air of picturesque energy, both bore themselves with a like graceful effrontery and self-possession.

The young man continued his way. The young girl lingered for a moment looking seaward, with her small brown hand lifted to shade her eyes,—a precaution which her heavy eyebrows and long lashes seemed to render utterly gratuitous.

"Come along, Mag. What are ye waitin' for?" said the young man impatiently.

"Nothin'. Lookin' at that boat from the Fort." Her clear eyes were watching a small skiff, invisible to less keen-sighted observers, aground upon a flat near the mouth of the channel. "Them chaps will

have a high ole time gunnin' thar, stuck in the mud, and the tide goin' out like sixty!"

"Never you mind the sodgers," returned her companion aggressively, "they kin take care o' their own precious skins, or Uncle Sam will do it for 'em —I reckon. Anyhow the people—that's you and me, Mag—is expected to pay for their foolishness. That's what they're sent yer for. Ye oughter to be satisfied with that," he added with deep sarcasm.

"I reckon they ain't expected to do much off o' dry land, and they can't help bein' queer on the water," returned the young girl with a reflecting sense of justice.

"Then they ain't no call to go gunnin'—and wastin' Guv'ment powder on ducks instead o' Injuns."

"Thet's so," said the girl, thoughtfully. "Wonder ef Guv'ment pays for them frocks the Kernel's girls went cavortin' round Logport in last Sunday—they looked like a cirkis."

"Like ez not the old Kernel gets it outer contracts—one way or another. *We* pay for it all the same," he added gloomily.

"Jest the same ez if they were *my* clothes," said the girl with a quick, fiery, little laugh, "ain't it? Wonder how they'd like my sayin' that to 'em when they was prancin' round, eh, Jim?"

But her companion was evidently unprepared for this sweeping feminine deduction, and stopped it with masculine promptitude.

"Look yer—instead o' botherin' your head about what the Fort girls wear, you'd better trot along a little more lively. It's late enough now."

"But these darned boots hurt like pizen," said the girl, limping. "They swallowed a lot o' water over the tops while I was wadin' down there, and my feet go swashin' around like in a churn every step."

"Lean on me, baby," he returned, passing his arm around her waist, and dropping her head smartly on his shoulder. "Thar." The act was brotherly and slightly contemptuous, but it was sufficient to at once establish their kinship.

They continued on thus for some moments in silence, the girl, I fear, after the fashion of her sex, taking the fullest advantage of this slightly sentimental and caressing attitude. They were moving now along the edge of the Marsh, parallel with the line of rapidly fading horizon, following some trail only known to their keen youthful eyes. It was growing darker and darker. The cries of the sea-birds had ceased; even the call of a belated plover had died away inland; the hush of death lay over

the black funereal pall of marsh at their side. The tide had run out with the day. Even the sea-breeze had lulled in this dead slack water of all Nature, as if waiting outside the bar with the ocean, the stars, and the night.

Suddenly the girl stopped, and halted her companion. The faint far sound of a bugle broke the silence, if the idea of interruption could have been conveyed by the two or three exquisite vibrations that seemed born of that silence itself, and to fade and die in it without break or discord. Yet it was only the "retreat" call from the Fort, two miles distant and invisible.

The young girl's face had become irradiated, and her small mouth half opened as she listened. "Do you know, Jim," she said with a confidential sigh, "I allus put words to that when I hear it—it's so pow'ful pretty. It allus goes to me like this: 'Goes the day, Far away, With the light, And the night Comes along—Comes along—Comes along—Like a-a-so-o-ong.'" She here lifted her voice, a sweet, fresh, boyish contralto, in such an admirable imitation of the bugle that her brother, after the fashion of more select auditors, was, for a moment, quite convinced that the words meant something. Nevertheless, as a brother, it was his duty to crush

this weakness. "Yes, and it says: 'Shut your head, Go to bed,'" he returned irascibly, "and *you'ld* better come along, if we're goin' to hev any supper. There's Yeller Bob hez got ahead of us over there with the game already."

The girl glanced towards a slouching, burdened figure that now appeared to be preceding them, straightened herself suddenly, and then looked attentively towards the Marsh.

"Not the sodgers again?" said her brother impatiently.

"No," said the girl quickly, "but if that don't beat anythin'! I'd hev sworn, Jim, that Yeller Bob was somewhere behind us. I saw him only jest now when 'Taps' sounded, somewhere over thar." She pointed with a half-uneasy expression in quite another direction from that in which the slouching Yellow Bob had just loomed.

"Tell ye what, Mag, makin' poetry outer bugle calls hez kinder muddled ye. *That's* Yeller Bob ahead, and ye orter know Injins well enuff by this time to remember that they allus crop up jest when ye don't expect them. And there's the bresh jest afore us. Come!"

The "bresh," or low bushes, was really a line of stunted willows and alders that seemed to have gradu-

ally sunk into the level of the plain, but increased in size farther inland, until they grew to the height and density of a wood. Seen from the channel it had the appearance of a green cape or promontory thrust upon the Marsh. Passing through its tangled recesses, with the aid of some unerring instinct, the two companions emerged upon another and much larger level that seemed as illimitable as the bay. The strong breath of the ocean lying just beyond the bar and estuary they were now facing came to them salt and humid as another tide. The nearer expanse of open water reflected the after-glow, and lightened the landscape. And between the two wayfarers and the horizon rose, bleak and startling, the strange outlines of their home.

At first it seemed a ruined colonnade of many pillars, whose base and pediment were buried in the earth, supporting a long parallelogram of entablature and cornices. But a second glance showed it to be a one-storied building, upheld above the Marsh by numberless piles placed at regular distances; some of them sunken or inclined from the perpendicular, increasing the first illusion. Between these pillars, which permitted a free circulation of air and, at extraordinary tides, even the waters of the bay itself, the level waste of marsh, the bay, the surges of the

bar, and finally the red horizon line were distinctly visible. A railed gallery or platform, supported also on piles, and reached by steps from the Marsh, ran around the building, and gave access to the several rooms and offices.

But if the appearance of this lacustrine and amphibious dwelling was striking, and not without a certain rude and massive grandeur, its ground and possessions through which the brother and sister were still picking their way were even more grotesque and remarkable. Over a space of half a dozen acres the flotsam and jetsam of years of tidal offerings were collected, and even guarded with a certain care. The blackened hulks of huge uprooted trees scarcely distinguishable from the fragments of genuine wrecks beside them were securely fastened by chains to stakes and piles driven in the marsh while heaps of broken and disjointed bamboo orange crates, held together by ropes of fibre, glistened like ligamented bones heaped in the dead valley. Masts, spars, fragments of shell-encrusted boats, binnacles, round houses, and galleys, and part of the after-deck of a coasting schooner, had ceased their wanderings and found rest in this vast cemetery of the sea. The legend on a wheel-house, the lettering on a stern or bow served for mortuary inscription. Wailed over

by the trade winds, mourned by lamenting sea-birds, once every year the tide visited its lost dead and left them wet with its tears.

To such a spot and its surroundings the atmosphere of tradition and mystery was not wanting. Six years ago Boone Culpepper had built the house, and brought to it his wife—variously believed to be a gypsy, a Mexican, a bright mulatto, a Digger Indian, a South Sea princess from Tahiti, somebody else's wife—but in reality a little Creole woman from New Orleans, with whom he had contracted a marriage, with other gambling debts, during a winter's vacation from his home in Virginia. At the end of two years she had died, succumbing, as differently stated, from perpetual wet feet, or the misanthropic idiosyncrasies of her husband, and leaving behind her a girl of twelve and a boy of sixteen to console him. How futile was this bequest may be guessed from a brief summary of Mr. Culpepper's peculiarities. They were the development of a singular form of aggrandisement and misanthropy. On his arrival at Logport he had bought a part of the apparently valueless Dedlow Marsh from the Government at less than a dollar an acre, continuing his singular investment year by year until he was the owner of three leagues of amphibious

domain. It was then discovered that this property carried with it the *water front* of divers valuable and convenient sites for manufactures and the commercial ports of a noble bay, as well as the natural *embarcaderos* of some "lumbering" inland settlements. Boone Culpepper would not sell. Boone Culpepper would not rent or lease. Boone Culpepper held an invincible blockade of his neighbours, and the progress and improvement he despised—granting only, after a royal fashion, occasional licence, revocable at pleasure, in the shape of tolls, which amply supported him, with the game he shot in his kingfisher's eyrie on the Marsh. Even the Government that had made him powerful was obliged to "condemn" a part of his property at an equitable price for the purposes of Fort Redwood, in which the adjacent town of Logport shared. And Boone Culpepper, unable to resist the act, refused to receive the compensation or quit claim the town. In his scant intercourse with his neighbours he always alluded to it as his own, showed it to his children as part of their strange inheritance, and exhibited the starry flag that floated from the Fort as a flaunting insult to their youthful eyes. Hated, feared, and superstitiously shunned by some, regarded as a madman by others, familiarly known as "The King-

fisher of Dedlow," Boone Culpepper was one day found floating dead in his skiff, with a charge of shot through his head and shoulders. The shot gun lying at his feet at the bottom of the boat indicated the "accident" as recorded in the verdict of the coroner's jury—but not by the people. A thousand rumours of murder or suicide prevailed, but always with the universal rider, "Served him right." So invincible was this feeling that but few attended his last rites, which took place at high water. The delay of the officiating clergyman lost the tide; the homely catafalque—his own boat—was left aground on the Marsh, and deserted by all mourners except the two children. Whatever he had instilled into them by precept and example, whatever took place that night in their lonely watch by his bier on the black marshes, it was certain that those who confidently looked for any change in the administration of the Dedlow Marsh were cruelly mistaken. The old Kingfisher was dead, but he had left in the nest two young birds, more beautiful and graceful, it was true, yet as fierce and tenacious of beak and talon.

II.

ARRIVING at the house the young people ascended the outer flight of wooden steps which bore an odd likeness to the companion-way of a vessel, and the gallery, or "deck," as it was called—where a number of nets, floats, and buoys thrown over the railing completed the nautical resemblance. This part of the building was evidently devoted to kitchen, dining-room, and domestic offices; the principal room in the centre, serving as hall or living room, and communicating on the other side with two sleeping apartments. It was of considerable size, with heavy lateral beams across the ceiling—built, like the rest of the house, with a certain maritime strength—and looked not unlike a saloon cabin. An enormous open Franklin stove between the windows, as large as a chimney, blazing with drift wood, gave light and heat to the apartment, and brought into flickering relief the boarded walls hung with the spoils of sea and shore, and glittering with gun-barrels. Fowling-pieces of all sizes, from the long ducking-

gun mounted on a swivel for boat use to the light single-barrel or carbine, stood in racks against the walls; game-bags, revolvers in their holsters, hunting and fishing knives in their sheaths, depended from hooks above them. In one corner stood a harpoon; in another two or three Indian spears for salmon. The carpetless floor and rude chairs and settles were covered with otter, mink, beaver, and a quantity of valuable sealskins, with a few larger pelts of the bear and elk. The only attempt at decoration was the displayed wings and breasts of the wood and harlequin duck, the muir, the cormorant, the gull, the gannet, and the femininely delicate half mourning of petrel and plover, nailed against the wall. The influence of the sea was dominant above all, and asserted its saline odours even through the spice of the drift wood smoke that half veiled the ceiling.

A berry-eyed old Indian woman with the complexion of dried salmon; her daughter also with berry eyes, and with a face that seemed wholly made of a moist laugh; "Yellow Bob," a Digger "buck," so called from the prevailing ochre markings of his cheek, and "Washooh," an ex-chief, a nondescript in a blanket, looking like a cheap and dirty doll whose fibrous hair was badly nailed on his

carved wooden head, composed the Culpepper household. While the two former were preparing supper in the adjacent dining-room, Yellow Bob, relieved of his burden of game, appeared on the gallery and beckoned mysteriously to his master through the window. James Culpepper went out, returned quickly, and after a minute's hesitation and an uneasy glance towards his sister, who had meantime pushed back her sou'wester from her forehead, and without taking off her jacket had dropped into a chair before the fire with her back towards him, took his gun noiselessly from the rack, and saying carelessly that he would be back in a moment, disappeared.

Left to herself, Maggie coolly pulled off her long boots and stockings, and comfortably opposed to the fire two very pretty feet and ankles, whose delicate purity were slightly blue-bleached by confinement in the tepid sea water. The contrast of their waxen whiteness with her blue woollen skirt, and with even the skin of her sunburnt hands and wrists, apparently amused her, and she sat for some moments with her elbows on her knees, her skirts slightly raised, contemplating them, and curling her toes with evident satisfaction. The firelight playing upon the rich colouring of her face, the fringe of jet black curls that almost met the thick sweep of eyebrows, and

left her only a white strip of forehead, her short upper lip and small chin, rounded but resolute, completed a piquant and striking figure. The rich brown shadows on the smoke-stained walls and ceiling, the occasional starting into relief of the scutcheons of brilliant plumage, and the momentary glitter of the steel barrels, made a quaint background to this charming picture. Sitting there, and following some lingering memory of her tramp on the Marsh, she hummed to herself a few notes of the bugle call that had impressed her—at first softly, and finally with the full pitch of her voice.

Suddenly she stopped.

There was a faint and unmistakable rapping on the floor beneath her. It was distinct, but cautiously given, as if intended to be audible to her alone. For a moment she stood upright, her feet still bare and glistening, on the otter skin that served as a rug. There were two doors to the room, one from which her brother had disappeared, which led to the steps, the other giving on the back gallery, looking inland. With a quick instinct she caught up her gun and ran to that one, but not before a rapid scramble near the railing was followed by a cautious opening of the door. She was just in time to shut it on the extended arm and light blue sleeve of an

army overcoat that protruded through the opening, and for a moment threw her whole weight against it.

"A dhrop of whisky, Miss, for the love of God."

She retained her hold, cocked her weapon, and stepped back a pace from the door. The blue sleeve was followed by the rest of the overcoat, and a blue cap with the infantry blazoning, and the letter "H" on its peak. They were for the moment more distinguishable than the man beneath them—grimed and blackened with the slime of the marsh. But what could be seen of his mud-stained face was more grotesque than terrifying. A combination of weakness and audacity, insinuation and timidity struggled through the dirt of expression. His small blue eyes were not ill-natured, and even the intruding arm trembled more from exhaustion than passion.

"On'y a dhrop, Miss," he repeated piteously, "and av ye pleeze, quick! afore I'm stharved with the cold entoirely."

She looked at him intently—without lowering her gun.

"Who are you?"

"Then, it's the truth I'll tell ye, Miss—whisth then!" he said in a half whisper; "I'm a desarter!"

"Then it was *you* that was doggin' us on the Marsh?"

"It was the sarjint I was lavin', Miss."

She looked at him hesitatingly.

"Stay outside there—if you move a step into the room, I'll blow you out of it."

He stepped back on the gallery. She closed the door, bolted it, and still holding the gun, opened a cupboard, poured out a glass of whisky, and returning to the door, opened it and handed him the liquor.

She watched him drain it eagerly, saw the fiery stimulant put life into his shivering frame, trembling hands, and kindle his dull eye—and—quietly raised her gun again.

"Ah, put it down, Miss, put it down! Fwhot's the use? Sure the bullets yee carry in them oiyes of yours is more deadly! It's out here oi'll sthand, glory be to God, all night, without movin' a fut till the sarjint comes to take me, av ye won't levil them oiyes at me like that. Ah, whirra! look at that now! but it's a gooddess she is—the livin' Jaynus of warr, standin' there like a statoo, wid her alybaster fut put forward."

In her pride and conscious superiority, any suggestion of shame at thus appearing before a common

man and a mendicant, was as impossible to her nature as it would have been to a queen or the goddess of his simile. His presence and his compliment alike passed her calm modesty unchallenged. The wretched scamp recognised the fact and felt its power, and it was with a superstitious reverence asserting itself through his native extravagance that he raised his grimy hand to his cap in military salute and became respectfully rigid.

"Then the sodgers were huntin' *you?*" she said thoughtfully, lowering her weapon.

"Thrue for you, Miss—they worr, and it's meself that was lyin' flat in the ditch wid me faytures makin' an illigant cast in the mud—more betoken, as ye see even now—and the sarjint and his daytail thrampin' round me. It was thin that the mortial could sthruck thro' me mouth, and made me wake for the whisky that would resthore me."

"What did you desert fer?"

"Ah, list to that now! Fwhot did I desart fer? Shure ev there was the ghost of an inemy round, it's meself that would be in the front now! But it was the letthers from me ould mother, Miss, that is sthruck wid a mortial illness—long life to her—in County Clare, and me sisthers in Ninth Avenue in New York, fornint the daypo, that is brekken their

harruts over me listin' in the Fourth Infanthry to do duty in a haythen wilderness. Av it was the cavalry —and it's me own father that was in the Innishkillen Dthragoons, Miss—oi wouldn't moind. Wid a horse betune me legs, it's on parade oi'd be now, Miss, and not wandhering over the bare flure of the Marsh, stharved wid the cold, the thirst, and hunger, wid the mud and the moire thick on me; facin' an illigant young leddy as is the ekal ov a Fayld Marshal's darter—not to sphake ov Kernal Preston's—ez couldn't hold a candle to her."

Brought up on the Spanish frontier, Maggie Culpepper was one of the few American girls who was not familiar with the Irish race. The rare smile that momentarily lit up her petulant mouth seemed to justify the intruder's praise. But it passed quickly, and she returned drily—

"That means you want more drink, suthin' to eat, and clothes. Suppose my brother comes back and ketches you here?"

"Shure, Miss, he's just now hunten me, along wid his two haythen Diggers, beyond the laygoon there. It worr the yellar one that sphotted me lyin' there in the ditch; it worr only your own oiyes, Miss—more power to their beauty for that—that

saw me folly him unbeknownst here; and that desaved them, ye see!"

The young girl remained for an instant silent and thoughtful.

"We're no friends of the Fort," she said finally, "but I don't reckon for that reason my brother will cotton to *you*. Stay out thar where ye are, till I come to ye. If you hear me singin' again, you'll know he's come back, and ye'd better scoot with what you've already got, and be thankful."

She shut the door again and locked it, went into the dining-room, returned with some provisions wrapped in paper, took a common wicker flask from the wall, passed into her brother's bedroom, and came out with a flannel shirt, "overalls," and a coarse Indian blanket, and, reopening the door, placed them before the astonished and delighted vagabond. His eye glistened; he began, "Glory be to God," but for once his habitual extravagance failed him. Nature triumphed with a more eloquent silence over his well-worn art. He hurriedly wiped his begrimed face and eyes with the shirt she had given him, and catching the sleeve of her rough pea-jacket in his dirty hand, raised it to his lips.

"Go!" she said imperiously. "Get away while you can."

"Av it was me last words—it's speechless oi am," he stammered, and disappeared over the railing.

She remained for a moment holding the door half open, and gazing into the darkness that seemed to flow in like a tide. Then she shut it, and going into her bedroom resumed her interrupted toilette. When she emerged again she was smartly stockinged and slippered, and even the blue serge skirt was exchanged for a bright print, with a white *fichu* tied around her throat. An attempt to subdue her rebellious curls had resulted in the construction from their ruins of a low Norman arch across her forehead with pillared abutments of ringlets. When her brother returned a few moments later she did not look up, but remained, perhaps a little ostentatiously, bending over the fire.

"Bob allowed that the Fort boat was huntin' *men*—deserters, I reckon," said Jim aggrievedly. "Wanted me to believe that he *saw* one on the Marsh hidin'. On'y an Injin lie, I reckon, to git a little extra fire-water, for toting me out to the bresh on a fool's errand."

"Oh, *that's* where you went!" said Maggie, addressing the fire. "Since when hev you tuk partner-

ship with the Guv'nment and Kernel Preston to hunt up and take keer of their property?"

"Well, I ain't goin' to hev such wreckage as they pick up and enlist set adrift on our marshes, Mag," said Jim decidedly.

"What would you hev done had you ketched him?" said Maggie, looking suddenly into her brother's face.

"Given him a dose of snipe shot that he'd remember, and be thankful it wasn't slugs," said Jim promptly. Observing a deeper seriousness in her attitude, he added, "Why, if it was in war-time he'd get a *ball* from them sodgers on sight."

"Yes, but *you* ain't got no call to interfere," said Maggie.

"Ain't I? Why, he's no better than an outlaw. I ain't sure that he hasn't been stealin' or killin' somebody over theer."

"Not *that* man!" said Maggie impulsively.

"Not what man?" said her brother, facing her quickly.

"Why," returned Maggie, repairing her indiscretion with feminine dexterity, "not *any* man who might have knocked you and me over on the marshes in the dusk, and grabbed our guns."

"Wish he'd hev tried it," said the brother, with

a superior smile, but a quickly rising colour. "Where d'ye suppose *I'd* hev been all the while?"

Maggie saw her mistake, and for the first time in her life resolved to keep a secret from her brother — overnight. "Supper's gettin' cold," she said, rising.

They went into the dining-room—an apartment as plainly furnished as the one they had quitted—but in its shelves, cupboards, and closely fitting boarding bearing out the general nautical suggestion of the house—and seated themselves before a small table on which their frugal meal was spread. In this *tête-à-tête* position Jim suddenly laid down his knife and fork and stared at his sister.

"Hello!"

"What's the matter?" said Maggie, starting slightly. "How you do skeer one."

"Who's been prinkin', eh?"

"My ha'r was in kinks all along o' that hat," said Maggie, with a return of higher colour, "and I had to straighten it. It's a boy's hat, not a girl's."

"But that necktie and that gown—and all those frills and tuckers?" continued Jim generalising, with a rapid twirling of his fingers over her. "Are you expectin' Judge Martin, or the Expressman, this evening?"

Judge Martin was the lawyer of Logport, who had proven her father's will, and had since raved about his single interview with the Kingfisher's beautiful daughter; the Expressman was a young fellow who was popularly supposed to have left his heart while delivering another valuable package on Maggie in person, and had "never been the same man since." It was a well-worn fraternal pleasantry that had done duty many a winter's evening, as a happy combination of moral admonition and cheerfulness. Maggie usually paid it the tribute of a quick little laugh and a sisterly pinch, but that evening those marks of approbation were withheld.

"Jim, dear," said she, when their Spartan repast was concluded and they were re-established before the living-room fire. "What was it the Redwood Mill Kempany offered you for that piece near Dead Man's Slough?"

Jim took his pipe from his lips long enough to say, "Ten thousand dollars," and put it back again.

"And what do ye kalkilate all our property, letting alone this yer house, and the driftwood front, is worth all together?"

"Includin' wot the Gove'nment owes us?—for that's all ours, ye know?" said Jim quickly.

"No—leavin' that out—jest for greens, you know," suggested Maggie.

"Well, nigh onter a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars, I reckon, by and large."

"That's a heap o' money, Jim! I reckon old Kernel Preston wouldn't raise that in a hundred years," continued Maggie, warming her knees by the fire.

"In five million years," said Jim, promptly sweeping away further discussion. After a pause he added, "You and me, Mag, kin see anybody's pile, and go 'em fifty thousand better."

There were a few moments of complete silence, in which Maggie smoothed her knees, and Jim's pipe, which seemed to have become gorged and apoplectic with its owner's wealth, snored unctuously.

"Jim, dear, what if—it's on'y an idea of mine, you know—what if you sold that piece to the Redwood Mill, and we just tuk that money and—and—and jest lifted the ha'r offer them folks at Logport? Jest as-tonished 'em! Jest tuk the best rooms in that new hotel, got a hoss and buggy, dressed ourselves, you and me, fit to kill, and made them Fort people take a back seat in the Lord's Tabernacle, oncet for all. You see what I mean, Jim," she said

hastily, as her brother seemed to be succumbing, like his pipe, in apoplectic astonishment, "jest on'y to *show* 'em what we *could* do if we keerd. Lord! when we done it and spent the money we'd jest snap our fingers and skip back yer ez nat'ral ez life! Ye don't think, Jim," she said, suddenly turning half fiercely upon him, "that I'd allow to *live* among 'em—to stay a menet after that!"

Jim laid down his pipe and gazed at his sister with stony deliberation. "And—what—do—you—kalkilate—to make by all that?" he said with scornful distinctness.

"Why, jest to show 'em we *have* got money, and could buy 'em all up if we wanted to," returned Maggie, sticking boldly to her guns, albeit with a vague conviction that her fire was weakened through elevation, and somewhat alarmed at the deliberation of the enemy.

"And you mean to say they don't know it now," he continued with slow derision.

"No," said Maggie. "Why, theer's that new school marm over at Logport, you know, Jim, the one that wanted to take your picter in your boat for a young smuggler or fancy pirate or Eyetalian fisherman, and allowed that your handsomed some, and offered to pay you for sittin'—do you reckon *she'd*

believe you owned the land her schoolhouse was built on. No! Lots of 'em don't. Lots of 'em thinks we're poor and low down—and them ez doesn't, thinks——"

"What?" asked her brother sharply.

"That we're *mean*."

The quick colour came to Jim's cheek. "So," he said, facing her quickly, "for the sake of a lot of riff-raff and scum that's drifted here around us—jest for the sake of cuttin' a swell before them—you'll go out among the hounds ez allowed your mother was a Spanish nigger or a kanaka, ez called your father a pirate and landgrabber, ez much as allowed he was shot by some one or killed himself a purpose, ez said you was a heathen and a looney because you didn't go to school or church along with their trash, ez kept away from Maw's sickness ez if it was small-pox, and Dad's fun'ral ez if he was a hoss-thief, and left you and me to watch his coffin on the marshes all night till the tide kem back. And now you—*you* that jined hands with me that night over our father lyin' there cold and despised—ez if he was a dead dog thrown up by the tide—and swore that ez long ez that tide ebbed and flowed it couldn't bring you to them, or them to you agin! You now want—what? What? Why,

to go and cast your lot among 'em, and live among 'em, and join in their God-forsaken holler foolishness, and—and—and——"

"Stop! It's a lie! I *didn't* say that. Don't you dare to say it," said the girl, springing to her feet, and facing her brother in turn, with flashing eyes.

For a moment the two stared at each other—it might have been as in a mirror, so perfectly were their passions reflected in each line, shade, and colour of the other's face. It was as if they had each confronted their own passionate and wilful souls, and were frightened. It had often occurred before, always with the same invariable ending. The young man's eyes lowered first; the girl's filled with tears.

"Well, ef ye didn't mean that, what did ye mean?" said Jim, sinking, with sullen apology, back into his chair.

"I—only—meant it—for—for—revenge!" sobbed Maggie.

"Oh!" said Jim, as if allowing his higher nature to be touched by this noble instinct. "But I didn't jest see where the revenge kem in."

"No? But never mind now, Jim," said Maggie, ostentatiously ignoring, after the fashion of her sex,

the trouble she had produced; "but to think—that —that—you thought——" (sobbing).

"But I didn't, Mag——" (caressingly).

With this very vague and impotent conclusion, Maggie permitted herself to be drawn beside her brother, and for a few moments they plumed each other's ruffled feathers, and smoothed each other's lifted crests like two beautiful young specimens of that halcyon genus to which they were popularly supposed to belong. At the end of half an hour Jim rose, and, yawning slightly, said in a perfunctory way—

"Where's the book?"

The book in question was the Bible. It had been the self-imposed custom of these two young people to read aloud a chapter every night as their one vague formula of literary and religious discipline. When it was produced Maggie, presuming on his affectionate and penitential condition, suggested that to-night he should pick out "suthin' interestin'." But this unorthodox frivolity was sternly put aside by Jim—albeit, by way of compromise, he agreed to "chance it"—*i.e.*, open its pages at random.

He did so. Generally he allowed himself a moment's judicious pause for a certain chaste preliminary inspection necessary before reading aloud

to a girl. To-night he omitted that modest precaution, and in a pleasant voice, which in reading was singularly free from colloquial infelicities of pronunciation, began at once—

"'Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.'"

"Oh, you looked first," said Maggie.

"I didn't now—honest Injin! I just opened."

"Go on," said Maggie, eagerly shoving him and interposing her neck over his shoulder.

And Jim continued Deborah's wonderful song of Jael and Sisera to the bitter end of its strong monosyllabic climax.

"There," he said, closing the volume, "that's what *I* call revenge. That's the real Scripture thing —no fancy frills theer."

"Yes, but Jim, dear, don't you see that she treated him first—sorter got round him with free milk and butter, and reg'larly blandished him," argued Maggie earnestly.

But Jim declined to accept this feminine suggestion, or to pursue the subject further, and after a fraternal embrace they separated for the night. Jim lingered long enough to look after the fastening

of the door and windows, and Maggie remained for some moments at her casement, looking across the gallery to the Marsh beyond.

The moon had risen, the tide was half up. Whatever sign or trace of alien footprint or occupation had been there was already smoothly obliterated; even the configuration of the land had changed. A black cape had disappeared, a level line of shore had been eaten into by teeth of glistening silver. The whole dark surface of the Marsh was beginning to be streaked with shining veins as if a new life was coursing through it. Part of the open bay before the Fort, encroaching upon the shore, seemed in the moonlight to be reaching a white and outstretched arm towards the nest of the Kingfisher.

III.

THE reveille at Fort Redwood had been supplemented full five minutes by the voice of Lieutenant George Calvert's servant, before that young officer struggled from his bed. His head was splitting, his tongue and lips were dry and feverish, his bloodshot eyes were shrinking from the insufferable light of the day, his mind a confused medley of the past night and the present morning, of cards and wild revelry, and the vision of a reproachfully trim orderly standing at his door with reports and orders which he now held composedly in his hand. For Lieutenant Calvert had been enjoying a symposium, variously known as "Stag Feed" and "A Wild and Stormy Night," with several of his brother officers, and a sickening conviction that it was not the first or the last time he had indulged in these festivities. At that moment he loathed himself, and then after the usual derelict fashion cursed the fate that had sent him, after graduating, to a frontier garrison—the dull monotony of whose duties made the Border

horse-play of dissipation a relief. Already he had reached the miserable point of envying the veteran capacities of his superiors and equals. "If I could drink like Kirby or Crowninshield, or if there was any other cursed thing a man could do in this hole," he had wretchedly repeated to himself, after each misspent occasion, and yet already he was looking forward to them as part of a "sub's" duty and worthy his emulation. Already the dream of social recreation fostered by West Point had been rudely dispelled. Beyond the garrison circle of Colonel Preston's family and two officers' wives, there was no society. The vague distrust and civil jealousy with which some frontier communities regard the Federal power, heightened in this instance by the uncompromising attitude the Government had taken towards the settlers' severe Indian policy had kept the people of Logport aloof from the Fort. The regimental band might pipe to them on Saturdays, but they would not dance.

Howbeit, Lieutenant Calvert dressed himself with uncertain hands but mechanical regularity and neatness, and, under the automatic training of discipline and duty, managed to button his tunic tightly over his feelings, to pull himself together with his sword-belt, compressing a still cadet-like waist, and to pre-

sent that indescribable combination of precision and jauntiness which his brother officers too often allowed to lapse into frontier carelessness. His closely clipped light hair, yet dripping from a plunge in the cold water, had been brushed and parted with military exactitude, and when surmounted by his cap, with the peak in an artful suggestion of extra smartness tipped forward over his eyes, only his pale face—a shade lighter than his little blonde moustache—showed his last night's excesses. He was mechanically reaching for his sword and staring confusedly at the papers on his table when his servant interrupted—

"Major Bromley arranged that Lieutenant Kirby takes your sash this morning, as you're not well, sir, and you're to report for special to the colonel," he added, pointing discreetly to the envelope.

Touched by this consideration of his superior, Major Bromley, who had been one of the veterans of last night's engagement, Calvert mastered the contents of the envelope without the customary anathema of specials, said—"Thank you, Parks," and passed out on the verandah.

The glare of the quiet sunlit quadrangle, clean as a well-swept floor, the white-washed walls and galleries of the barrack buildings beyond, the white

and green palisade of officers' cottages on either side, and the glitter of a sentry's bayonet, were for a moment intolerable to him. Yet, by a kind of subtle irony, never before had the genius and spirit of the vocation he had chosen seemed to be as incarnate as in the scene before him. Seclusion, self-restraint, cleanliness, regularity, sobriety, the atmosphere of a wholesome life, the austere reserve of a monastery without its mysterious or pensive meditation, were all there. To escape which he had of his own free will successively accepted a fool's distraction, the inevitable result of which was, the viewing of them the next morning with tremulous nerves and aching eyeballs.

An hour later, Lieutenant George Calvert had received his final instructions from Colonel Preston to take charge of a small detachment to recover and bring back certain deserters, but notably one, Dennis M'Caffrey of Company H, charged additionally with mutinous solicitation and example. As Calvert stood before his superior that distinguished officer, whose oratorical powers had been considerably stimulated through a long course of "returning thanks for the Army," slightly expanded his chest and said paternally—

"I am aware, Mr. Calvert, that duties of this

kind are somewhat distasteful to young officers, and are apt to be considered in the light of police detail, but I must remind you that no one part of a soldier's duty can be held more important or honourable than another, and that the fulfilment of any one, however trifling, must, with honour to himself and security to his comrades, receive his fullest devotion. A sergeant and a file of men might perform your duty, but I require, in addition, the discretion, courtesy, and consideration of a gentleman who will command an equal respect from those with whom his duty brings him in contact. The unhappy prejudices which the settlers show to the military authority here, render this, as you are aware a difficult service, but I believe that you will, without forgetting the respect due to yourself and the Government you represent, avoid arousing these prejudices by any harshness, or inviting any conflict with the civil authority. The limits of their authority you will find in your written instructions, but you might gain their confidence and impress them, Mr. Calvert, with the idea of your being their *auxiliary* in the interests of justice—you understand. Even if you are unsuccessful in bringing back the men, you will do your best to ascertain if their escape has been due to the sympathy of the settlers, or even with their prelimi-

nary connivance. They may not be aware that inciting enlisted men to desert is a criminal offence; you will use your own discretion in informing them of the fact or not, as occasion may serve you. I have only to add, that while you are on the waters of this bay and the land covered by its tides, you have no opposition of authority, and are responsible to no one but your military superiors. Good-bye, Mr. Calvert. Let me hear a good account of you."

Considerably moved by Colonel Preston's manner, which was as paternal and real as his rhetoric was somewhat perfunctory, Calvert half forgot his woes as he stepped from the commandant's piazza. But he had to face a group of his brother officers, who were awaiting him,—

"Good-bye, Calvert," said Major Bromley, "a day or two out on grass won't hurt you—and a change from Commissary whisky will put you all right. By the way, if you hear of any better stuff at Westport than they're giving us here, sample it and let us know. Take care of yourself. Give your men a chance to talk to you now and then, and you may get something from them, especially Donovan. Keep your eye on Ramon. You can trust your sergeant straight along."

"Good-bye, George," said Kirby. "I suppose

the old man told you that, although no part of a soldier's duty was better than another, your service was a very delicate one, just fitted for you, eh? He always does when he's cut out some hellish scrub-work for a chap. And told you, too, that as long as you didn't go ashore, and kept to a despatch-boat, or an eight-oared gig, where you couldn't deploy your men, or dress a line, you'd be invincible."

"He did say something like that," smiled Calvert, with an uneasy recollection, however, that it was *the* part of his superior's speech that particularly impressed him.

"Of course," said Kirby gravely, "*that,* as an infantry officer, is clearly your duty."

"And don't forget, George," said Rollins still more gravely, "that, whatever may befall you, you belong to a section of that numerically small but powerfully diversified organisation — the American Army. Remember that in the hour of peril you can address your men in any language, and be perfectly understood. And remember that when you proudly stand before them, the eyes not only of your own country, but of nearly all the others, are upon you! Good-bye, Georgey. I heard the major hint something about whisky. They say that old pirate, Kingfisher Culpepper, had a stock of the real

thing from Robertson County laid in his shebang on the Marsh just before he died. Pity we aren't on terms with them, for the cubs cannot drink it, and might be induced to sell. Shouldn't wonder, by the way, if your friend M'Caffrey was hanging round somewhere there; he always had a keen scent. You might confiscate it as an 'incitement to desertion,' you know. The girl's pretty, and ought to be growing up now."

But haply at this point the sergeant stopped further raillery by reporting the detachment ready; and drawing his sword, Calvert, with a confused head, a remorseful heart, but an unfaltering step, marched off his men on his delicate mission.

It was four o'clock when he entered Jonesville. Following a matter-of-fact idea of his own, he had brought his men the greater distance by a circuitous route through the woods, thus avoiding the ostentatious exposure of his party on the open bay in a well-manned boat to an extended view from the three leagues of shore and marsh opposite. Crossing the stream, which here separated him from the Dedlow Marsh by the common ferry, he had thus been enabled to halt unperceived below the settlement and occupy the two roads by which the fugitives could escape inland. He had deemed it not im-

possible that after the previous visit of the sergeant, the deserters hidden in the vicinity might return to Jonesville in the belief that the visit would not be repeated so soon. Leaving a part of his small force to patrol the road and another to deploy over the upland meadows, he entered the village. By the exercise of some boyish diplomacy and a certain prepossessing grace, which he knew when and how to employ, he became satisfied that the objects of his quest were not *there*—however, their whereabouts might have been known to the people. Dividing his party again, he concluded to take a corporal and a few men and explore the lower marshes himself.

The preoccupation of duty, exercise, and perhaps above all the keen stimulus of the iodine-laden salt air seemed to clear his mind and invigorate his body. He had never been in the Marsh before, and enjoyed its novelty with the zest of youth. It was the hour when the tide of its feathered life was at its flood. Clouds of duck and teal passing from the fresh water of the river to the salt pools of the marshes perpetually swept his path with flying shadows; at times it seemed as if even the uncertain ground around him itself arose and sped away on dusky wings. The vicinity of hidden pools

and sloughs was betrayed by startled splashings; a few paces from their marching feet arose the sunlit pinions of a swan. The air was filled with multitudinous small cries and pipings. In this vocal confusion it was some minutes before he recognised the voice of one of his out-flankers calling to the other.

An important discovery had been made. In a long tongue of bushes that ran down to the Marsh they had found a mud-stained uniform, complete even to the cap, bearing the initial of the deserter's company.

"Is there any hut or cabin hereabouts, Schmidt?" asked Calvert.

"Dot vos schoost it, Lefdennun," replied his corporal. "Dot vos de shanty from der Kingvisher—old Gulbebber. I pet a dollar, py shimminy, dot der men haf der gekommt."

He pointed through the brake to a long low building that now raised itself, white in the sunlight, above the many blackened piles. Calvert saw, in a single reconnoitring glance, that it had but one approach—the flight of steps from the Marsh. Instructing his men to fall in on the outer edge of the brake and await his orders, he quickly made his way across the space and ascended the steps. Passing along the gallery he knocked at the front

door. There was no response. He repeated his knock. Then the window beside it opened suddenly, and he was confronted with the double-muzzle of a long ducking gun. Glancing instinctively along the barrels, he saw at their other extremity the bright eyes, brilliant colour, and small set mouth of a remarkably handsome girl. It was the fact, and to the credit of his training, that he paid more attention to the eyes than to the challenge of the shining tubes before him.

"Jest stop where you are—will you!" said the girl determinedly.

Calvert's face betrayed not the slightest terror or surprise. Immovable as on parade, he carried his white gloved hand to his cap, and said gently, "With pleasure."

"Oh yes," said the girl quickly, "but if you move a step I'll jest blow you and your gloves offer that railin' inter the Marsh."

"I trust not," returned Calvert, smiling.

"And why?"

"Because it would deprive me of the pleasure of a few moments' conversation with you—and I've only one pair of gloves with me."

He was still watching her beautiful eyes—respectfully, admiringly, and strategically. For he was

quite convinced that if he *did* move she would certainly discharge one or both barrels at him.

"Where's the rest of you?" she continued sharply.

"About three hundred yards away, in the covert, not near enough to trouble you."

"Will they come here?"

"I trust not."

"You trust not?" she repeated scornfully. "Why?"

"Because they would be disobeying orders."

She lowered her gun slightly, but kept her black brows levelled at him. "I reckon I'm a match for *you*," she said with a slightly contemptuous glance at his slight figure, and opened the door. For a moment they stood looking at each other. He saw, besides the handsome face and eyes that had charmed him, a tall slim figure, made broader across the shoulders by an open pea-jacket that showed a man's red flannel shirt belted at the waist over a blue skirt, with the collar knotted by a sailor's black handkerchief, and turned back over a pretty though sunburnt throat. She saw a rather undersized young fellow in a jaunty undress uniform, scant of gold braid, and bearing only the single gold shoulder-bars of his rank, but scrupulously neat and well fitting. Light-coloured hair cropped close, the smallest of

light moustaches, clear and penetrating blue eyes. and a few freckles completed a picture that did not prepossess her. She was therefore the more inclined to resent the perfect ease and self-possession with which the stranger carried off these manifest defects before her.

She laid aside the gun, put her hands deep in the pockets of her pea-jacket, and, slightly squaring her shoulders, said curtly, "What do you want?"

"A very little information, which I trust it will not trouble you to give me. My men have just discovered the uniform belonging to a deserter from the Fort lying in the bushes yonder. Can you give me the slightest idea how it came there?"

"What right have you trapseing over our property?" she said, turning upon him sharply with a slight paling of colour.

"None whatever."

"Then what did you come for?"

"To ask that permission, in case you would give me no information."

"Why don't you ask my brother, and not a woman? Were you afraid?"

"He could hardly have done me the honour of placing me in more peril than you have," returned

Calvert, smiling. "Then I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Culpepper?"

"I'm Jim Culpepper's sister."

"And, I believe, equally able to give or refuse the permission I ask."

"And what if I refuse?"

"Then I have only to ask pardon for having troubled you, go back, and return here with the tide. You don't resist *that* with a shot-gun, do you?" he asked pleasantly.

Maggie Culpepper was already familiar with the accepted theory of the supreme jurisdiction of the Federal Sea. She half turned her back upon him, partly to show her contempt, but partly to evade the domination of his clear, good-humoured, and self-sustained little eyes.

"I don't know anythin' about your deserters, nor what rags o' theirs happen to be floated up here," she said angrily, "and don't care to. You kin do what you like."

"Then I'm afraid I should remain here a little longer, Miss Culpepper, but my duty——"

"Your wot?" she interrupted disdainfully.

"I suppose I *am* talking shop," he said smilingly. "Then my business——"

"Your business—pickin' up half-starved runaways!"

"And, I trust, sometimes a kind friend," he suggested with a grave bow.

"You *trust*? Look yer, young man," she said with her quick, fierce, little laugh, "I reckon you *trust* a heap too much!" She would like to have added, "with your freckled face, red hair, and little eyes"—but this would have obliged her to face them again, which she did not care to do.

Calvert stepped back, lifted his hand to his cap, still pleasantly, and then walked gravely along the gallery, down the steps, and towards the cover. From her window, unseen, she followed his neat little figure moving undeviatingly on, without looking to the left or right, and still less towards the house he had just quitted. Then she saw the sunlight flash on cross-belt plates and steel barrels, and a light blue line issued from out the dark green bushes, round the point, and disappeared. And then it suddenly occurred to her what she had been doing! This, then, was her first step towards that fancy she had so lately conceived, quarrelled over with her brother, and lay awake last night to place anew, in spite of all opposition! This was her brilliant idea of dazzling and subduing Logport and the Fort!

Had she grown silly, or what had happened? Could she have dreamed of the coming of this whipper-snapper, with his insufferable airs, after that beggarly deserter? I am afraid that for a few moments the miserable fugitive had as small a place in Maggie's sympathy as the redoubtable whipper-snapper himself. And now the cherished dream of triumph and conquest was over! What a "looney" she had been! Instead of inviting him in, and outdoing him in "company manners," and "fooling" him about the deserter, and then blazing upon him afterwards at Logport in the glory of her first spent wealth and finery, she had driven him away!

And now "he'll go and tell—tell the Fort girls of his hairbreadth escape from the claws of the Kingfisher's daughter!"

The thought brought a few bitter tears to her eyes, but she wiped them away. The thought brought also the terrible conviction that Jim was right, that there could be nothing but open antagonism between them and the traducers of their parents, as she herself had instinctively shown! But she presently wiped that conviction away also, as she had her tears.

Half an hour later she was attracted by the appearance from the windows of certain straggling

blue spots on the upland that seemed moving diagonally towards the Marsh. She did not know that it was Calvert's second "detail" joining him, but believed for a moment that he had not yet departed, and was strangely relieved. Still later the frequent disturbed cries of coot, heron, and marsh hen, recognising the presence of unusual invaders of their solitude, distracted her yet more, and forced her at last with increasing colour and an uneasy sense of shyness to steal out to the gallery for a swift furtive survey of the Marsh. But an utterly unexpected sight met her eyes, and kept her motionless.

The birds were rising everywhere and drifting away with querulous perturbation before a small but augmented blue detachment that was moving with monotonous regularity towards the point of bushes where she had seen the young officer previously disappear. In their midst, between two soldiers with fixed bayonets, marched the man whom even at that distance she instantly recognised as the deserter of the preceding night, in the very clothes she had given him. To complete her consternation, a little to the right marched the young officer also, but accompanied by, and apparently on the most amiable terms with, Jim—her own brother!

To forget all else and dart down the steps, flying

towards the point of bushes, scarcely knowing why or what she was doing, was to Maggie the impulse and work of a moment. When she had reached it the party were not twenty paces away. But here a sudden shyness and hesitation again seized her, and she shrank back in the bushes with an instinctive cry to her brother inarticulate upon her lips. They came nearer, they were opposite to her; her brother Jim keeping step with the invader, and even conversing with him with an animation she had seldom seen upon his face—they passed! She had been unnoticed, except by one. The roving eye of the deserter had detected her handsome face among the leaves, slightly turned towards it, and poured out his whole soul in a single swift wink of eloquent but indescribable confidence.

When they had quite gone, she crept back to the house, a little reassured, but still tremulous. When her brother returned at nightfall, he found her brooding over the fire, in the same attitude as on the previous night.

"I reckon ye might hev seen me go by with the sodgers," he said, seating himself beside her a little awkwardly, and with an unusual assumption of carelessness.

Maggie, without looking up, was languidly sur-

prised. He had been with the soldiers — and where?

"About two hours ago I met this yer Leftenant Calvert," he went on, with increasing awkwardness, "and—oh, I say, Mag—he said he saw you, and hoped he hadn't troubled ye, and—and—ye saw him, didn't ye?"

Maggie, with all the red of the fire concentrated in her cheek as she gazed at the flame, believed carelessly "that she had seen a shrimp in uniform asking questions."

"Oh, he ain't a bit stuck up," said Jim quickly, "that's what I like about him. He's as nat'ral ez you be, and tuck my arm, walkin' around, careless-like, laffen at what he was doin', ez ef it was a game, and he wasn't sole commander of forty men. He's only a year or two older than me—and—and——" he stopped and looked uneasily at Maggie.

"So ye've bin craw-fishin' agin?" said Maggie in her deepest and most scornful contralto.

"Who's craw-fishin'?" he retorted angrily.

"What's this backen' out o' what you said yesterday? What's all this trucklin' to the Fort now?"

"What? Well, now, look yer," said Jim, rising suddenly, with reproachful indignation, "darned if I

don't jest tell ye everythin'. I promised *him* I wouldn't. He allowed it would frighten ye."

"*Frighten me!*" repeated Maggie contemptuously, nevertheless with her cheek paling again. "Frighten me—with what?"

"Well, since yer so cantankerous, look yor. We've been robbed!"

"Robbed?" echoed Maggie, facing him.

"Yes, robbed by that same deserter! Robbed of a suit of my clothes, and my whisky-flask, and the darned skunk had 'em on. And if it hadn't bin for that Leftenant Calvert, and my givin' him permission to hunt him over the Marsh, we wouldn't have caught him."

"Robbed?" repeated Maggie again, vaguely.

"Yes, robbed! Last night, afore we came home. He must hev got in yer, while we was comin' from the boat."

"Did—did, that Leftenant say so?" stammered Maggie.

"Say it, of course he did, and so do I," continued Jim impatiently. "Why, there were my very clothes on his back, and he daren't deny it. And if you'd hearkened to me jest now, instead of flyin' off in tantrums, you'd see that *that's* jest how we got him, and how me and the Leftenant joined hands in

it. I didn't give him permission to hunt deserters, but *thieves*. I didn't help him to ketch the man that deserted from *him*, but the skunk that took *my* clothes. For when the Leftenant found the man's old uniform in the bush, he nat'rally kalkilated he must hev got some other duds near by in some underhand way. Don't you see? Eh? Why, look, Mag. Darned if you ain't skeered after all! Who'd hev thought it? There now—sit down, dear. Why, you're white ez a gull."

He had his arm round her as she sank back in the chair again with a forced smile.

"There now," he said with fraternal superiority, "don't mind it, Mag, any more. Why, it's all over now. You bet he won't trouble us agin, for the Leftenant sez that now he's found out to be a thief, they'll jest turn him over to the police, and he's sure o' getten' six months' State prison fer stealin' and burglarin' in our house. But," he stopped suddenly and looked at his sister's contracted face. "Look yer, Mag. You're sick, that's what's the matter. Take suthin'——"

"I'm better now," she said with an effort, "it's only a kind o' blind chill I must hev got on the Marsh last night. What's that?"

She had risen, and grasping her brother's arm

tightly had turned quickly to the window. The casement had suddenly rattled.

"It's only the wind gettin' up. It looked like a sou'wester when I came in. Lot o' scud flyin'. But *you* take some quinine, Mag. Don't *you* go now and get down sick like Maw."

Perhaps it was this well-meant but infelicitous reference that brought a moisture to her dark eyes, and caused her lips to momentarily quiver. But it gave way to a quick determined setting of her whole face as she turned it once more to the fire, and said slowly—

"I reckon I'll sleep it off, if I go to bed now. What time does the tide fall."

"About three, unless this yer wind piles it up on the Marsh afore then. Why?"

"I was only wonderin' if the boat wus safe," said Maggie, rising.

"You'd better hoist yourself outside some quinine, instead o' talken' about those things," said Jim, who preferred to discharge his fraternal responsibility by active medication. "You aren't fit to read to-night."

"Good night, Jim," she said suddenly, stopping before him.

"Good night, Mag," He kissed her with pro-

tecting and amiable toleration, generously referring her hot hands and feverish lips to that vague mystery of feminine complaint which man admits without endorsing.

They separated. Jim, under the stimulus of the late supposed robbery, ostentatiously fastening the doors and windows with assuring comments, calculated to inspire confidence in his sister's startled heart. Then he went to bed. He lay awake long enough to be pleasantly conscious that the wind had increased to a gale, and to be lulled again to sleep by the cosy security of the heavily timbered and tightly sealed dwelling that seemed to ride the storm like the ship it resembled. The gale swept through the piles beneath him and along the gallery as through bared spars and over wave-washed decks. The whole structure, attacked above, below, and on all sides by the fury of the wind, seemed at times to be lifted in the air. Once or twice the creaking timbers simulated the sound of opening doors and passing footsteps, and again dilated as if the gale had forced a passage through. But Jim slept on peacefully, and was at last only aroused by the brilliant sunshine staring through his window from the clear wind-swept blue arch beyond.

Dressing himself lazily, he passed into the

sitting-room, and proceeded to knock at his sister's door, as was his custom; he was amazed to find it open and the room empty. Entering hurriedly he saw that her bed was undisturbed, as if it had not been occupied and was the more bewildered to see a note ostentatiously pinned upon the pillow, addressed in pencil in a large school-girl hand, "To Jim."

Opening it impatiently, he was startled to read as follows:—

"Don't be angry, Jim dear—but it was all my fault—and I didn't tell you. I knew all about the deserter, and I gave him the clothes and things that they say he stole. It was while you was out that night, and he came and begged of me, and was mournful and hidjus to behold. I thought I was helping him, and getting our revenge on the Fort, all at the same time. Don't be mad, Jim dear, and don't be frighted fer me. I'm going over thar to make it all right—to free *him* of stealing—to have *you* left out of it all—and take it all on myself. Don't you be a bit feared for me. I ain't skeert of the wind or of going. I'll close reef everything, clear the creek, stretch across to Injen Island, hugg the Point, and bear up fer Logport. Dear Jim—don't get mad—but I couldn't bear this fooling of you nor *him*—and that man being took for stealing any longer!—Your loving sister,

MAGGIE."

With a confused mingling of shame, anger, and sudden fear he ran out on the gallery. The tide was well up, half the Marsh had already vanished,

and the little creek where he had moored his skiff was now an empty shining river. The water was everywhere—fringing the tussocks of salt grass with concentric curves of spume and drift, or tumultuously tossing its white-capped waves over the spreading expanse of the lower bay. The low thunder of breakers in the farther estuary broke monotonously on the ear. But his eye was fascinated by a dull shifting streak on the horizon that, even as he gazed, shuddered, whitened along its whole line, and then grew ghastly gray again. It was the ocean bar.

IV.

"WELL, I must say," said Cicely Preston, emphasising the usual feminine imperative for perfectly gratuitous statement, as she pushed back her chair from the commandant's breakfast table, "I *must* really say that I don't see anything particularly heroic in doing something wrong, lying about it just to get other folks into trouble, and then rushing off to do penance in a high wind and an open boat. But she's pretty, and wears a man's shirt and coat, and of course *that* settles anything. But why earrings and wet white stockings and slippers? And why that Gothic arch of front and a boy's hat? That's what I simply ask," and the youngest daughter of Colonel Preston rose from the table, shook out the skirt of her pretty morning dress; and, placing her little thumbs in the belt of her smart waist, paused witheringly for a reply.

"You are most unfair, my child," returned Colonel Preston gravely. "Her giving food and clothes to a deserter may have been only an ordinary instinct of

humanity towards a fellow-creature who appeared to be suffering, to say nothing of M'Caffrey's plausible tongue. But her perilling her life to save him from an unjust accusation, and her desire to shield her brother's pride from ridicule, is altogether praiseworthy and extraordinary. And the moral influence of her kindness was strong enough to make that scamp refuse to tell the plain truth that might implicate her in an indiscretion, though it saved him from State prison."

"He knew you wouldn't believe him if he had said the clothes were given to him," retorted Miss Cicely, "so I don't see where the moral influence comes in. As to her perilling her life, those Marsh people are amphibious anyway, or would be in those clothes. And, as to her motive, why papa, I heard you say in this very room, and afterwards to Mr. Calvert, when you gave him instructions, that you believed those Culpeppers were capable of enticing away deserters; and you forget the fuss you had with her savage brother's lawyer about that water front, and how you said it was such people who kept up the irritation between the Civil and Federal power."

The colonel coughed hurriedly. It is the fate of all great organisers, military as well as civil, to occasionally suffer defeat in the family circle.

"The more reason," he said soothingly, "why we should correct harsh judgments that spring from mere rumours. You should give yourself at least the chance of overcoming your prejudices, my child. Remember, too, that she is now the guest of the Fort."

"And she chooses to stay with Mrs. Bromley! I'm sure it's quite enough for you and mamma to do duty—and Emily—who wants to know why Mr. Calvert raves so about her—without *my* going over there to stare."

Colonel Preston shook his head reproachfully, but eventually retired, leaving the field to the enemy. The enemy, a little pink in the cheeks, slightly tossed the delicate rings of its blonde crest, settled its skirts again at the piano, but after turning over the leaves of its music book, rose, and walked pettishly to the window.

But here a spectacle presented itself that for a moment dismissed all other thoughts from the girl's rebellious mind.

Not a dozen yards away on the wind-swept parade a handsome young fellow, apparently halted by the sentry, had impetuously turned upon him in an attitude of indignant and haughty surprise. To the quick fancy of the girl it seemed as if some

disguised rustic god had been startled by the challenge of a mortal. Under an oilskin hat, like the *petasus* of Hermes, pushed back from his white forehead crisp black curls were knotted around a head, whose beardless face was perfect as a cameo cutting. In the close-fitting blue-woollen jersey under his open jacket the clear outlines and youthful grace of his upper figure were revealed as clearly as in a statue. Long fishing-boots reaching to his thighs scarcely concealed the symmetry of his lower limbs. Cricket and lawn-tennis, knicker-bockers and flannels had not at that period familiarised the female eye to unfettered masculine outline, and Cicely Preston, accustomed to the artificial smartness and regularity of uniform, was perhaps the more impressed by the stranger's lawless grace.

The sentry had repeated his challenge; an angry flush was deepening on the intruder's cheek. At this critical moment Cicely threw open the French windows and stepped upon the verandah.

The sentry saluted the familiar little figure of his colonel's daughter with an explanatory glance at the stranger. The young fellow looked up—and the god became human.

I'm "looking for my sister," he said half awkwardly half defiantly—"she's here, somewhere."

"Yes—and perfectly safe, Mr. Culpepper, I think"—said the arch-hypocrite with dazzling sweetness, "and we're all so delighted. And so brave and plucky, and skilful in her to come all that way—and for such a purpose."

"Then—you know—all about it"—stammered Jim, more relieved than he had imagined—"and that I——"

"That you were quite ignorant of your sister helping the deserter—Oh yes, of course,"—said Cicely with bewildering promptitude. "You see, Mr. Culpepper, we girls are *so* foolish. I daresay *I* should have done the same thing in her place, only *I* should never have had the courage to do what she did afterwards. You really must forgive her. But won't you come in—*do.*" She stepped back, holding the window open with the half-coaxing air of a spoiled child. "This way is quickest. *Do* come." As he still hesitated, glancing from her to the house, she added, with a demure little laugh, "Oh, I forget this is Colonel Preston's quarters, and I'm his daughter."

And this dainty little fairy, so natural in manner, so tasteful in attire was one of the artificial overdressed creatures that his sister had—inveighed against so bitterly! Was Maggie really to be trusted?

This new revelation coming so soon after the episode of the deserter staggered him. Nevertheless he hesitated—looking up with a certain boyish timidity into Cicely's dangerous eyes.

"Is—is—my sister there?"

"I'm expecting her with my mother every moment," responded this youthful but ingenious diplomatist sweetly; "she might be here now, but," she added with a sudden heart-broken flash of sympathy, "I know *how* anxious you both must be. *I'll* take you to her now. Only one moment, please." The opportunity of leading this handsome savage as it were in chains across the parade, before everybody, her father, her mother, her sister, and *his*—was not to be lost. She darted into the house, and reappeared with the daintiest imaginable straw hat on the side of her head, and demurely took her place at his side. "It's only over there, at Major Bromley's," she said, pointing to one of the vine-clad cottage quarters; "but you are a stranger here, you know, and might get lost."

Alas! he was already that. For keeping step with those fairy-like slippers, brushing awkwardly against that fresh and pretty skirt, and feeling the caress of the soft folds; looking down upon the brim of that beribboned little hat, and more often meet-

ing the upturned blue eyes beneath it, Jim was suddenly struck with a terrible conviction of his own contrasting coarseness and deficiencies. How hideous those oiled canvas fishing trousers and pilot jacket looked beside this perfectly fitted and delicately gowned girl! He loathed his collar, his jersey, his turned-back sou'wester, even his height, which seemed to hulk beside her—everything, in short, that the girl had recently admired. By the time that they had reached Major Bromley's door he had so far succumbed to the fair enchantress and realised her ambition of a triumphant procession, that when she ushered him into the presence of half a dozen ladies and gentlemen he scarcely recognised his sister as the centre of attraction, or knew that Miss Cicely's effusive greeting of Maggie was her first one. "I knew he was dying to see you after all you had *both* passed through, and I brought him straight here," said the diminutive Machiavelli, meeting the astonished gaze of her father and the curious eyes of her sister with perfect calmness, while Maggie, full of gratitude and admiration of her handsome brother, forgot his momentary obliviousness, and returned her greeting warmly. Nevertheless, there was a slight movement of reserve among the gentlemen at the unlooked-for irruption of this sunburnt

Adonis, until Calvert, disengaging himself from Maggie's side, came forward with his usual frank imperturbability and quiet tact, and claimed Jim as his friend and honoured guest.

It then came out with that unostentatious simplicity which characterised the brother and sister, and was their secure claim to perfect equality with their entertainers, that Jim, on discovering his sister's absence, and fearing that she might be carried by the current towards the bar, had actually *swam the estuary* to Indian Island, and in an ordinary Indian canoe had braved the same tempestuous passage she had taken a few hours before. Cicely, listening to this recital with rapt attention, nevertheless managed to convey the impression of having fully expected it from the first. "Of course he'd have come here—if she'd only waited," she said, *sotto voce,* to her sister Emily.

"He's certainly the handsomer of the two," responded that young lady.

"Of course," returned Cicely, with a superior air, "don't you see she *copies* him."

Not that this private criticism prevented either from vying with the younger officers in their attentions to Maggie, with perhaps the addition of an open eulogy of her handsome brother, more or less

invidious in comparison to the officers. "I suppose it's an active out-of-door life gives him that perfect grace and freedom," said Emily with a slight sneer at the smartly belted Calvert. "Yes, and he don't drink or keep late hours," responded Cicely significantly. "His sister says they always retire before ten o'clock, and that although his father left him some valuable whisky he seldom takes a drop of it." "Therein," gravely concluded Captain Kirby, "lies *our* salvation. If, after such a confession, Calvert doesn't make the most of his acquaintance with young Culpepper to remove that whisky from his path and bring it here, he's not the man I take him for."

Indeed, for the moment it seemed as if he was not. During the next three or four days, in which Colonel Preston had insisted upon detaining his guests, Calvert touched no liquor, evaded the evening poker parties at quarters, and even prevailed upon some of his brother officers to give them up for the more general entertainment of the ladies. Colonel Preston was politician enough to avail himself of the popularity of Maggie's adventure to invite some of the Logport people to assist him in honouring their neighbour. Not only was the old feud between the Fort and the people thus bridged over,

but there was no doubt that the discipline of the Fort had been strengthened by Maggie's extravagant reputation as a mediator among the disaffected rank and file. Whatever characteristic licence the grateful Dennis M'Caffrey—let off with a nominal punishment—may have taken in his praise of the "Quane of the Marshes," it is certain that the men worshipped her, and that the band pathetically begged permission to serenade her the last night of her stay.

At the end of that time, with a dozen invitations, a dozen appointments, a dozen vows of eternal friendship, much hand-shaking, and accompanied by a number of the officers to their boat, Maggie and Jim departed. They talked but little on their way home; by some tacit understanding they did not discuss those projects, only recalling certain scenes and incidents of their visit. By the time they had reached the little creek the silence and nervous apathy which usually follow excitement in the young seemed to have fallen upon them. It was not until after their quiet frugal supper that, seated beside the fire, Jim looked up somewhat self-consciously in his sister's grave and thoughtful face.

"Say, Mag, what was that idea o' your's about selling some land, and taking a house at Logport?"

Maggie looked up, and said passively, "Oh, *that* idea?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well," said Jim somewhat awkwardly, "it *could* be done, you know. I'm willin'."

As she did not immediately reply, he continued uneasily, "Miss Preston says we kin get a nice little house that is near the Fort, until we want to build."

"Oh, then you *have* talked about it?"

"Yes—that is—why, what are ye thinkin' of, Mag? Wasn't it *your* idea all along?" he said, suddenly facing her in querulous embarrassment. They had been sitting in their usual evening attitudes of Assyrian frieze profile, with even more than the usual Assyrian frieze similarity of feature.

"Yes—but, Jim, dear—do you think it the best thing for—for us to do?" said Maggie, with half-frightened gravity.

At this sudden and startling exhibition of female inconsistency and inconsequence, Jim was for a moment speechless. Then he recovered himself, volubly, aggrievedly, and on his legs. What *did* she mean? Was he to give up understanding girls—or was it their sole vocation in life to impede masculine processes and shipwreck masculine conclusions? Here,

after all she said the other night, after they had nearly "quo'lled" over her "set idees," after she'd gone over all that foolishness about Jael and Sisera —and there wasn't any use for it—after she'd let him run on to them officers all he was goin' to do —nay, after *she* herself, for he had heard her, had talked to Calvert about it, she wanted to know *now*, if it was best! He looked at the floor and the ceiling, as if expecting the tongued and grooved planks to cry out at this crowning enormity.

The cause of it had resumed her sad gaze at the fire. Presently, without turning her head, she reached up her long graceful arm, and clasping her brother's neck, brought his face down in profile with her own, cheek against cheek, until they looked like the double outlines of a medallion. Then she said —to the fire,—

"Jim, do you think she's pretty?"

"Who?" said Jim, albeit his colour had already answered the question.

"You know *who*. Do you like her?"

Jim here vaguely murmured to the fire that he thought her "kinder nice," and that she dressed mighty purty. "Ye know, Mag," he said with patronising effusion, "ye oughter get some gownds like her's."

"That wouldn't make me like her," said Maggie gravely.

"I don't know about that," said Jim politely, but with an appalling hopelessness of tone. After a pause he added slyly, "'Pears to me *somebody else* thought somebody else mighty purty—eh?"

To his discomfiture she did not solicit further information. After a pause he continued, still more archly—

"Do you like *him,* Mag?"

"I think he's a perfect gentleman," she said calmly.

He turned his eyes quickly from the glowing fire to her face. The cheek that had been resting against his own was as cool as the night wind that came through the open door, and the whole face was as fixed and tranquil as the upper stars.

V.

For a year the tide had ebbed and flowed on the Dedlow Marsh unheeded before the sealed and sightless windows of the "Kingfisher's Nest." Since the young birds had flown to Logport, even the Indian caretakers had abandoned the piled dwelling for their old nomadic haunts in the "bresh." The high spring-tide had again made its annual visit to the little cemetery of drift wood, and, as if recognising another wreck in the deserted home, had hung a few memorial offerings on the blackened piles, softly laid a garland of grayish drift before it, and then sobbed itself out in the salt grass.

From time to time faint echoes of the Culpeppers' life at Logport reached the upland, and the few neighbours who had only known them by hearsay shook their heads over the extravagance they as yet only knew by report. But it was in the dead ebb of the tide and the waning daylight that the feathered tenants of the Marsh seemed to voice dismal prophecies of the ruin of their old master and mistress,

and to give themselves up to gloomiest lamentation and querulous foreboding. Whether the traditional "bird of the air" had entrusted his secret to a few ornithological friends, or whether from a natural disposition to take gloomy views of life, it was certain that at this hour the vocal expression of the Marsh was hopeless and despairing. It was then that a dejected plover, addressing a mocking crew of sandpipers on a floating log, seemed to bewail the fortune that was being swallowed up by the riotous living and gambling debts of Jim. It was then that the querulous crane rose, and testily protested against the selling of his favourite haunt in the sandy peninsula, which only six months of Jim's excesses had made imperative. It was then that a mournful curlew, who, with the preface that he had always been really expecting it, reiterated the story that Jim had been seen more than once staggering home with nervous hands and sodden features from a debauch with the younger officers; it was the same desponding fowl who knew that Maggie's eyes had more than once filled with tears at Jim's failings, and had already grown more hollow with many watchings. It was a flock of wrangling teal that screamingly discussed the small scandals, jealous heart-burnings, and curious backbitings that had at-

tended Maggie's advent into society. It was the high-flying brent who, knowing how the sensitive girl, made keenly conscious at every turn of her defective training and ingenuous ignorance, had often watched their evening flight with longing gaze, now "houked" dismally at the recollection. It was at this hour and season that the usual vague lamentings of Dedlow Marsh seemed to find at last a preordained expression. And it was at such a time, when light and water were both fading, and the blackness of the Marsh was once more reasserting itself, that a small boat was creeping along one of the tortuous inlets, at times half hiding behind the bank like a wounded bird. As it slowly penetrated inland it seemed to be impelled by its solitary occupant in a hesitating uncertain way, as if to escape observation rather than as if directed to any positive bourn. Stopping beside a bank of reeds at last, the figure rose stoopingly, and drew a gun from between its feet and the bottom of the boat. As the light fell upon its face, it could be seen that it was James Culpepper! James Culpepper! hardly recognisable in the swollen features, bloodshot eyes, and tremulous hands of that ruined figure! James Culpepper, only retaining a single trace of his former self in his look of set and passionate purpose! And

that purpose was to kill himself—to be found dead, as his father had been before him—in an open boat, adrift upon the Marsh!

It was not the outcome of a sudden fancy. The idea had first come to him in a taunting allusion from the drunken lips of one of his ruder companions, for which he had stricken the offender to the earth. It had since haunted his waking hours of remorse and hopeless fatuity; it had seemed to be the one relief and atonement he could make his devoted sister, and, more fatuous than all, it seemed to the miserable boy the one revenge he would take upon the faithless coquette, who for a year had played with his simplicity, and had helped to drive him to the distraction of cards and drink. Only that morning Colonel Preston had forbidden him the house; and now it seemed to him the end had come. He raised his distorted face above the reedy bank for a last tremulous and half-frightened glance at the landscape he was leaving for ever. A glint in the western sky lit up the front of his deserted dwelling in the distance, abreast of which the windings of the inlet had unwittingly led him. As he looked he started, and involuntarily dropped into a crouching attitude. For, to his superstitious terror, the sealed windows of his old home were open, the

bright panes were glittering with the fading light, and on the outer gallery the familiar figure of his sister stood, as of old, awaiting his return! Was he really going mad, or had this last vision of his former youth been purposely vouchsafed him?

But, even as he gazed, the appearance of another figure in the landscape beyond the house proved the reality of his vision, and as suddenly distracted him from all else. For it was the apparition of a man on horseback approaching the house from the upland; and even at that distance he recognised its well-known outlines. It was Calvert! Calvert the traitor! Calvert, the man whom he had long suspected as being the secret lover and destined husband of Cicely Preston! Calvert, who had deceived him with his calm equanimity and his affected preference for Maggie, to conceal his deliberate understanding with Cicely. What was he doing here? Was he a double traitor, and now trying to deceive *her*—as he had him? And Maggie here! This sudden return—this preconcerted meeting. It was infamy!

For a moment he remained stupefied, and then, with a mechanical instinct, plunged his head and face in the lazy-flowing water, and then once again rose cool and collected. The half-mad distraction

of his previous resolve had given way to another, more deliberate, but not less desperate determination. He knew now *why* he came there—*why* he had brought his gun—why his boat had stopped when it did!

Lying flat in the bottom, he tore away fragments of the crumbling bank to fill his frail craft, until he had sunk it to the gunwale, and below the low level of the Marsh. Then, using his hands as noiseless paddles, he propelled this rude imitation of a floating log slowly past the line of vision, until the tongue of bushes had hidden him from view. With a rapid glance at the darkening flat, he then seized his gun, and springing to the spongy bank, half crouching half crawling through reeds and tussocks, he made his way to the brush. A foot and eye less experienced would have plunged its owner helpless in the black quagmire. At one edge of the thicket he heard hoofs trampling the dried twigs. Calvert's horse was already there, tied to a skirting alder.

He ran to the house, but, instead of attracting attention by ascending the creaking steps, made his way to the piles below the rear gallery and climbed to it noiselessly. It was the spot where the deserter had ascended a year ago, and, like him, he could see and hear all that passed distinctly. Calvert stood near the open door as if departing. Maggie stood

between him and the window, her face in shadow, her hands clasped tightly behind her. A profound sadness, partly of the dying day and waning light, and partly of some vague expiration of their own sorrow, seemed to encompass them. Without knowing why, a strange trembling took the place of James Culpepper's fierce determination, and a film of moisture stole across his staring eyes.

"When I tell you that I believe all this will pass, and that you will still win your brother back to you," said Calvert's sad but clear voice, "I will tell you why—although, perhaps, it is only a part of that confidence you command me to withhold. When I first saw you, I, myself, had fallen into like dissolute habits; less excusable than him, for I had some experience of the world and its follies. When I met *you*, and fell under the influence of your pure, simple, and healthy life; when I saw that isolation, monotony, misunderstanding, even the sense of superiority to one's surroundings could be lived down and triumphed over, without vulgar distractions or pitiful ambitions; when I learned to love you—hear me out, Miss Culpepper, I beg you—you saved *me*—I, who was nothing to you, even as I honestly believe you will still save your brother, whom you love."

"How do you know I didn't *ruin* him?" she said, turning upon him bitterly. "How do you know that it wasn't to get rid of *our* monotony, *our* solitude, that I drove him to this vulgar distraction! this pitiful—yes, you were right—pitiful ambition?"

"Because it isn't your real nature," he said quietly.

"My real nature," she repeated with a half-savage vehemence that seemed to be goaded from her by his very gentleness, "my real nature! What did *he*—what do *you* know of it?—My real nature, —I'll tell you what it was," she went on passionately. "It was to be revenged on you all for your cruelty, your heartlessness, your wickedness to me and mine in the past. It was to pay you off for your slanders of my dead father—for the selfishness that left me and Jim alone with his dead body on the Marsh. That was what sent me to Logport—to get even with you—to—to fool and flaunt you! There, you have it now! And now that God has punished me for it by crushing my brother—you—you expect me to let you crush *me* too."

"But," he said eagerly, advancing towards her, "you are wronging me—you are wronging yourself, cruelly."

"Stop," she said, stepping back, with her hands

still locked behind her. "Stay where you are. There! That's enough!" She drew herself up and let her hands fall at her side. "Now let us speak of Jim," she said coldly.

Without seeming to hear her, he regarded her for the first time with hopeless sadness.

"Why did you let my brother believe you were his rival with Cicely Preston?" she asked impatiently.

"Because I could not undeceive him without telling him I hopelessly loved his sister. You are proud, Miss Culpepper," he said, with the first tinge of bitterness in his even voice. "Can you not understand that others may be proud too?"

"No," she said bluntly; "it is not pride but weakness. You could have told him what you knew to be true. That there could be nothing in common between her folk and such savages as we—that there was a gulf as wide as that Marsh and as black between our natures, our training and theirs, and even if they came to 'us across it, now and then, to suit their pleasure light and easy as that tide—it was still there to some day ground and swamp them! And if he doubted it, you had only to tell him your own story. You had only to tell him what you have just told me—that you yourself, an officer and a gentleman, thought you loved me

—a vulgar, uneducated, savage girl, and that I, kinder to you than you to me or him, made you take it back across that tide, because I couldn't let you link your life with me, and drag you in the mire."

"You need not have said that, Miss Culpepper," returned Calvert with the same gentle smile, "to prove that I am your inferior in all but one thing."

"And that?" she said quickly.

"Is my love."

His gentle face was as set now as her own as he moved back slowly towards the door. There he paused.

"You tell me to speak of Jim, and Jim only. Then hear me. I believe that Miss Preston cares for him as far as lies in her young and giddy nature. I could not, therefore, have crushed *his* hope without deceiving him, for there are as cruel deceits prompted by what we call reason as by our love. If you think that a knowledge of this plain truth would help to save him, I beg you to be kinder to him than you have been to me. Or even, let me dare to hope, to *yourself.*"

He slowly crossed the threshold, still holding his cap lightly in his hand.

"When I tell you that I am going away to-morrow on a leave of absence, and that in all probability we may not meet again, you will not mis-

understand why I add my prayer to the message your friends in Logport charged me with. They beg that you will give up your idea of returning here, and come back to them. Believe me, you have made yourself loved and respected there in spite—I beg pardon—perhaps I should say *because* of your pride. Good-night and good-bye."

For a single instant she turned her set face to the window with a sudden convulsive movement as if she would have called him back, but at the same moment the opposite door creaked and her brother slipped into the room. Whether a quick memory of the deserter's entrance at that door a year ago had crossed her mind, whether there was some strange suggestion in his mud-stained garments and weak deprecating smile, or whether it was the outcome of some desperate struggle within her, there was that in her face that changed his smile into a frightened cry for pardon, as he ran and fell on his knees at her feet. But even as he did so her stern look vanished, and with her arm around him she bent over him and mingled her tears with his.

"I heard it all, Mag, dearest! All! Forgive me! I have been crazy!—wild!—I will reform!—I will be better! I will never disgrace you again, Mag! Never, never! I swear it!"

She reached down and kissed him. After a pause, a weak boyish smile struggled into his face.

"You heard what he said of *her,* Mag. Do you think it might be true?"

She lifted the damp curls from his forehead with a sad half-maternal smile, but did not reply.

"And Mag, dear, don't you think *you* were a little—just a little—hard on *him?* No! Don't look at me that way, for God's sake! There, I didn't mean anything. Of course you knew best. There, Maggie, dear, look up. Hark there! Listen, Mag, do!"

They lifted their eyes to the dim distance seen through the open door. Borne on the fading light, and seeming to fall and die with it over marsh and river, came the last notes of the bugle from the Fort.

"There! Don't you remember what you used to say, Mag?"

The look that had frightened him had quite left her face now.

"Yes," she smiled, laying her cold cheek beside his softly. "Oh yes! It was something that came and went, 'Like a song'—'Like a song.'"

A KNIGHT-ERRANT OF THE FOOT-HILLS.

A KNIGHT-ERRANT OF THE FOOT-HILLS.

I.

As Father Felipe slowly toiled up the dusty road towards the Rancho of the Blessed Innocents, he more than once stopped under the shadow of a sycamore to rest his somewhat lazy mule and to compose his own perplexed thoughts by a few snatches from his breviary. For the good *padre* had some reason to be troubled. The invasion of Gentile Americans that followed the gold discovery of three years before had not confined itself to the plains of the Sacramento, but stragglers had already found their way to the Santa Cruz Valley, and the seclusion of even the mission itself was threatened. It was true that they had not brought their heathen engines to disembowel the earth in search of gold, but it was rumoured that they had already speculated upon the agricultural productiveness of the land, and

had espied "the fatness thereof." As he reached the higher plateau he could see the afternoon sea-fog —presently to obliterate the fair prospect—already pulling through the gaps in the coast range, and on a nearer slope—no less ominously—the smoke of a recent but more permanently destructive Yankee saw-mill was slowly drifting towards the valley.

"Get up, beast!" said the father, digging his heels into the comfortable flanks of his mule with some human impatience, "or art *thou*, too, a lazy renegade? Thinkest thou, besotted one, that the heretic will spare thee more work than the Holy Church?"

The mule, thus apostrophised in ear and flesh, shook its head obstinately as if the question was by no means clear to its mind, but nevertheless started into a little trot, which presently brought it to the low *adobe* wall of the courtyard of "The Innocents," and entered the gate. A few lounging *peons* in the shadow of an archway took off their broad-brimmed hats and made way for the padre, and a half dozen equally listless *vaqueros* helped him to alight. Accustomed as he was to the indolence and superfluity of his host's retainers, to-day it nevertheless seemed to strike some note of irritation in his breast.

A stout middle-aged woman of ungirt waist and

beshawled head and shoulders appeared at the gateway as if awaiting him. After a formal salutation she drew him aside into an inner passage.

"He is away again, your Reverence," she said.

"Ah—always the same?"

"Yes, your Reverence—and this time to a 'meeting' of the heretics at their *pueblo*, at Jonesville—where they will ask him of his land for a road."

"At a *meeting?*" echoed the priest uneasily.

"Ah yes! a meeting—where Tiburcio says they shout and spit on the ground, your Reverence, and only one has a chair and him they call a 'chairman' because of it, and yet he sits not but shouts and spits even as the others and keeps up a tapping with a hammer like a very *pico*. And there it is they are ever 'resolving' that which is not, and consider it even as done."

"Then he is still the same," said the priest gloomily as the woman paused for breath.

"Only more so, your Reverence, for he reads nought but the newspaper of the *Americanos* that is brought in the ship, the *New York 'errald*—and recites to himself the orations of their legislators. Ah! it was an evil day when the shipwrecked American sailor taught him his uncouth tongue, which, as your

Reverence knows, is only fit for beasts and heathen incantation."

"Pray Heaven *that* were all he learned of him," said the priest hastily, "for I have great fear that this sailor was little better than an atheist and an emissary from Satan. But where are these newspapers and the fantasies of *publicitad* that fill his mind? I would see them, my daughter."

"You shall, your Reverence, and more too," she replied eagerly, leading the way along the passage to a grated door which opened upon a small cell-like apartment whose scant light and less air came through the deeply embayed windows in the outer wall. "Here is his *estudio*."

In spite of this open invitation, the padre entered with that air of furtive and minute inspection common to his order. His glance fell upon a rude surveyor's plan of the adjacent embryo town of Jonesville hanging on the wall, which he contemplated with a cold disfavour that even included the coloured vignette of the projected Jonesville Hotel in the left-hand corner. He then passed to a supervisor's notice hanging near it, which he examined with a suspicion heightened by that uneasiness common to mere worldly humanity when opposed to an unknown and unfamiliar language. But an exclamation broke from his lips when he

confronted an election placard immediately below it. It was printed in Spanish and English, and Father Felipe had no difficulty in reading the announcement that "Don José Sepulvida would preside at a meeting of the Board of Education in Jonesville as one of the trustees."

"This is madness," said the padre.

Observing that Doña Maria was at the moment preoccupied in examining the pictorial pages of an illustrated American weekly which had hitherto escaped his eyes, he took it gently from her hand.

"Pardon, your Reverence," she said with slightly acidulous deprecation, "but thanks to the Blessed Virgin and your Reverence's teaching the text is but gibberish to me and I did but glance at the pictures."

"Much evil may come in with the eye," said the priest sententiously, "as I will presently show thee. We have here," he continued, pointing to an illustration of certain college athletic sports, "a number of youthful cavaliers posturing and capering in a partly nude condition before a number of shameless women, who emulate the saturnalia of heathen Rome by waving their handkerchiefs. We have here a companion picture," he said, indicating an illustration of gymnastic exercise by the students of a female academy at "Commencement," "in which, as thou

seest, even the aged of both sexes unblushingly assist as spectators with every expression of immodest satisfaction."

"Have they no bull-fights or other seemly recreation that they must indulge in such wantonness?" asked Doña Maria indignantly, gazing, however, somewhat curiously at the baleful representations.

"Of all that, my daughter, has their pampered civilisation long since wearied," returned the good padre, "for see, this is what they consider a moral and even a religious ceremony." He turned to an illustration of a woman's rights convention; "observe with what rapt attention the audience of that heathen temple watch the inspired ravings of that elderly priestess on the daïs. It is even this kind of sacrilegious performance that I am told thy nephew Don José expounds and defends."

"May the blessed saints preserve us; where will it lead to?" murmured the horrified Doña Maria.

"I will show thee," said Father Felipe, briskly turning the pages with the same lofty ignoring of the text until he came to a representation of a labour procession. "There is one of their periodic revolutions unhappily not unknown even in Mexico. Thou perceivest those complacent artisans marching with implements of their craft, accompanied by the

military, in the presence of their own stricken masters. Here we see only another instance of the instability of all communities that are not founded on the principles of the Holy Church."

"And what is to be done with my nephew?"

The good father's brow darkened with the gloomy religious zeal of two centuries ago. "We must have a council of the family, the alcalde, and the archbishop, at *once*," he said ominously. To the mere heretical observer the conclusion might have seemed lame and impotent, but it was as near the Holy Inquisition as the year of grace 1852 could offer.

A few days after this colloquy the unsuspecting subject of it, Don José Sepulvida, was sitting alone in the same apartment. The fading glow of the western sky, through the deep embrasured windows, lit up his rapt and meditative face. He was a young man of apparently twenty-five, with a colourless satin complexion, dark eyes alternating between melancholy and restless energy, a narrow high forehead, long straight hair, and a lightly pencilled moustache. He was said to resemble the well-known portrait of the Marquis of Monterey in the mission church, a face that was alleged to leave a deep and lasting impression upon the observers. It was undoubtedly owing to this quality during a brief visit

of the famous viceroy to a remote and married ancestress of Don José at Leon that the singular resemblance may be attributed.

A heavy and hesitating step along the passage stopped before the grating. Looking up, Don José beheld to his astonishment the slightly inflamed face of Roberto, a vagabond American whom he had lately taken into his employment.

Roberto, a polite translation of "Bob the Bucker," cleaned out at a monte-bank in Santa Cruz, penniless and profligate, had sold his mustang to Don José and recklessly thrown himself in with the bargain. Touched by the rascal's extravagance, the quality of the mare, and observing that Bob's habits had not yet affected his seat in the saddle, but rather lent a demoniac vigour to his chase of wild cattle, Don José had retained rider and horse in his service as vaquero.

Bucking Bob, observing that his employer was alone, coolly opened the door without ceremony, shut it softly behind him, and then closed the wooden shutter of the grating. Don José surveyed him with mild surprise and dignified composure. The man appeared perfectly sober,—it was a peculiarity of his dissipated habits that, when not actually raving with drink, he was singularly shrewd and practical.

"Look yer, Don Kosay," he began in a brusque but guarded voice, "you and me is pards. When ye picked me and the mare up and set us on our legs again in this yer ranch, I allowed I'd tie to ye whenever you was in trouble—and wanted me. And I reckon that's what's the matter now. For from what I see and hear on every side, although you're the boss of this consarn, you're surrounded by a gang of spies and traitors. Your comings and goings, your ins and outs, is dogged and followed and blown upon. The folks you trust is playing it on ye. It ain't for me to say why or wherefore—what's their rights and what's yourn—but I've come to tell ye that if you don't get up and get outer this ranch them d——d priests and your own flesh and blood—your aunts and your uncles and your cousins, will have you chucked outer your property, and run into a lunatic asylum."

"Me—Don José Sepulvida—a lunatico! You are yourself crazy of drink, friend Roberto."

"Yes," said Roberto grimly, "but that kind ain't *illegal,* while your makin' ducks and drakes of your property and going into 'Merikin ideas and 'Merikin speculations they reckon is. And speakin' on the square, it ain't *nat'ral.*"

Don José sprang to his feet and began to pace

up and down his cell-like study. "Ah, I remember now," he muttered, "I begin to comprehend: Father Felipe's homilies and discourses! My aunt's too affectionate care! My cousin's discreet consideration! The prompt attention of my servants! I see it all! And you," he said, suddenly facing Roberto, "why come you to tell me this?"

"Well, boss," said the American drily, "I reckoned to stand by you."

"Ah," said Don José, visibly affected, "Good Roberto, come hither, child, you may kiss my hand."

"If! it's all the same to you, Don Kosay,—*that* kin slide."

"Ah, if—yes," said Don José, meditatively putting his hand to his forehead, "miserable that I am!—I remembered not you were *Americano.* Pardon, my friend—embrace me—*Compañero y Amigo.*"

With characteristic gravity he reclined for a moment upon Robert's astonished breast. Then recovering himself with equal gravity he paused, lifted his hand with gentle warning, marched to a recess in the corner, unhooked a rapier hanging from the wall and turned to his companion—

"We will defend ourselves, friend Roberto. It is the sword of the *Comandante*—my ancestor. The blade is of Toledo."

"An ordinary six-shooter of Colt's would lay over that," said Roberto grimly—"but that ain't your game just now, Don Kosay. You must get up and get, and at once. You must *vamose* the ranch afore they lay hold of you and have you up before the alcalde. Once away from here, they daren't follow you where there's 'Merikin law, and when you kin fight 'em on the square."

"Good," said Don José with melancholy preciseness. "You are wise, friend Roberto. We may fight them later as you say—on the square, or in the open Plaza. And you, *camarada, you* shall go with me—you and your mare."

Sincere as the American had been in his offer of service, he was somewhat staggered at this imperative command. But only for a moment. "Well," he said lazily, "I don't care if I do."

"But," said Don José with increased gravity, "you *shall* care, friend Roberto. We shall make an alliance, an union. It is true, my brother, you drink of whisky, and at such times are even as a madman. It has been recounted to me that it was necessary to your existence that you are a lunatic three days of the week. Who knows? I myself, though I drink not of *aguardiente,* am accused of fantasies for all time. Necessary it becomes there-

fore that we should go *together*. My fantasies and speculations cannot injure you, my brother; your whisky shall not empoison me. We shall go together in the great world of your American ideas of which I am much inflamed. We shall together breathe as one the spirit of Progress and Liberty. We shall be even as neophytes making of ourselves Apostles of Truth. I absolve and renounce myself henceforth of my family. I shall take to myself the sister and the brother, the aunt and the uncle, as we proceed. I devote myself to humanity alone. I devote *you*, my friend, and the mare—though happily she has not a Christian soul—to this glorious mission."

The few level last rays of light lit up a faint enthusiasm in the face of Don José, but without altering his imperturbable gravity. The *vaquero* eyed him curiously and half doubtfully.

"We will go to-morrow," resumed Don José with solemn decision, "for it is Wednesday. It was a Sunday that thou didst ride the mare up the steps of the Fonda and demanded that thy liquor should be served to thee in a pail. I remember it, for the landlord of the Fonda claimed twenty *pesos* for damage and the kissing of his wife. Therefore by computation, good Roberto, thou shouldst be sober

until Friday, and we shall have two clear days to fly before thy madness again seizes thee."

"They kin say what they like, Don Kosay, but *your* head is level," returned the unabashed American, grasping Don José's hand. "All right, then. *Hasta mañana*, as your folks say."

"Hasta mañana," repeated Don José gravely.

At daybreak next morning, while slumber still weighted the lazy eyelids of "the Blessed Innocents," Don José Sepulvida and his trusty squire Roberto, otherwise known as "Bucking Bob," rode forth unnoticed from the corral.

II.

THREE days had passed. At close of the third, Don José was seated in a cosy private apartment of the San Mateo Hotel, where they had halted for an arranged interview with his lawyer before reaching San Francisco. From his window he could see the surrounding park-like avenues of oaks and the level white high road, now and then clouded with the dust of passing teams. But his eyes were persistently fixed upon a small copy of the American Constitution before him. Suddenly there was a quick rap on his door, and before he could reply to it a man brusquely entered.

Don José raised his head slowly, and recognised the landlord. But the intruder, apparently awed by the gentle, grave, and studious figure before him, fell back for an instant in an attitude of surly apology.

"Enter freely, my good Jenkinson," said Don José, with a quiet courtesy that had all the effect of irony.

"The apartment, such as it is, is at your disposition. It is even yours as is the house."

"Well, I'm darned if I know as it is," said the landlord, recovering himself roughly, "and that's jest what's the matter. Yer's that man of yours smashing things right and left in the bar-room and chuckin' my waiters through the window."

"Softly, softly, good Jenkinson," said Don José, putting a mark in the pages of the volume before him. "It is necessary first that I should correct your speech. He is not my '*man*,' which I comprehend to mean a slave, a hireling, a thing obnoxious to the great American nation which *I* admire and to which *he* belongs. Therefore, good Jenkinson, say 'friend,' 'companion,' 'guide,' 'philosopher,' if you will. As to the rest, it is of no doubt as you relate. I myself have heard the breakings of glass and small dishes as I sit here: three times I have seen your waiters projected into the road with much violence and confusion. To myself I have then said, even as I say to you, good Jenkinson, 'Patience, patience, the end is not far.' In four hours," continued Don José, holding up four fingers, "he shall make a finish. Until then, not."

"Well, I'm d——d," ejaculated Jenkinson, gasping for breath in his indignation.

"Nay, excellent Jenkinson, not dam-ned but of a possibility dam-*aged*. That I shall repay when he have make a finish."

"But, darn it all," broke in the landlord angrily.

"Ah," said Don José gravely, "you would be paid before! Good; for how much shall you value *all* you have in your bar?"

Don José's imperturbability evidently shook the landlord's faith in the soundness of his own position. He looked at his guest critically and audaciously.

"It cost me two hundred dollars to fit it up," he said curtly.

Don José rose, and, taking a buckskin purse from his saddle bag, counted out four slugs * and handed them to the stupefied Jenkinson. The next moment, however, his host recovered himself, and casting the slugs back on the little table, brought his fist down with an emphasis that made them dance.

"But, look yer—suppose I want this thing stopped —you hear me—*stopped*—now."

"That would be interfering with the liberty of

* Hexagonal gold pieces valued at $50 each, issued by a private firm as coin in the early days.

the subject, my good Jenkinson—which God forbid!" said Don José calmly. "Moreover, it is the custom of the *Americanos*—a habit of my friend Roberto—a necessity of his existence—and so recognised of his friends. Patience and courage, Señor Jenkinson. Stay—ah, I comprehend! you have—of a possibility—a wife?"

"No, I'm a widower," said Jenkinson sharply.

"Then I congratulate you. My friend Roberto would have kissed her. It is also of his habit. Truly you have escaped much. I embrace you, Jenkinson."

He threw his arms gravely around Jenkinson, in whose astounded face at last an expression of dry humour faintly dawned. After a moment's survey of Don José's impenetrable gravity, he coolly gathered up the gold coins, and saying that he would assess the damages and return the difference, he left the room as abruptly as he had entered it.

But Don José was not destined to remain long in peaceful study of the American Constitution. He had barely taken up the book again and renewed his serious contemplation of its excellencies when there was another knock at his door. This time, in obedience to his invitation to enter, the new visitor

approached with more deliberation and a certain formality.

He was a young man of apparently the same age as Don José, handsomely dressed, and of a quiet self-possession and gravity almost equal to his host's.

"I believe I am addressing Don José Sepulvida," he said with a familiar yet courteous inclination of his handsome head. Don José, who had risen in marked contrast to his reception of his former guest, answered—

"You are truly making to him a great honour."

"Well, you're going it blind as far as *I'm* concerned certainly," said the young man, with a slight smile, "for you don't know *me*."

"Pardon, my friend," said Don José gently, "in this book, this great Testament of your glorious nation, I have read that you are all equal, one not above, one not below the other, I salute in you, the Nation! It is enough!"

"Thank you," returned the stranger, with a face that, saving the faintest twinkle in the corner of his dark eyes, was immovable as his host's, "but for the purposes of my business I had better say I am Jack Hamlin, a gambler, and am just now dealing faro in the Florida saloon round the corner."

He paused carelessly, as if to allow Don José the protest he did not make, and then continued—

"The matter is this. One of your *vaqueros,* who is, however, an American, was round there an hour ago bucking against faro, and put up and *lost,* not only the mare he was riding, but a horse which I have just learned is yours. Now we reckon, over there, that we can make enough money playing a square game, without being obliged to take property from a howling drunkard, to say nothing of it not belonging to him, and I've come here, Don José, to say that if you'll send over and bring away your man and your horse you can have 'em both."

"If I have comprehend, honest Hamlin," said Don José slowly, "this Roberto, who was my *vaquero* and is my brother, has approached this faro game by himself, unsolicited?"

"He certainly didn't seem shy of it," said Mr. Hamlin with equal gravity. "To the best of my knowledge, he looked as if he'd been there before."

"And if he had won, excellent Hamlin, you would have given him the equal of his mare and horse?"

"A hundred dollars for each, yes, certainly."

"Then I see not why I should send for the pro-

perty which is truly no longer mine, nor for my brother who will amuse himself after the fashion of his country in the company of so honourable a *caballero* as yourself! Stay! oh imbecile that I am. I have not remembered. You would possibly say that he has no longer of horses? Play him; play him, admirable yet prudent Hamlin. *I* have two thousand horses! Of a surety he cannot exhaust them in four hours. Therefore play him, trust to me for *recompensa,* and have no fear."

A quick flush covered the stranger's cheek, and his eyebrows momentarily contracted. He walked carelessly to the window, however, glanced out, and then turned to Don José.

"May I ask, then," he said with almost sepulchral gravity, "is anybody taking care of you?"

"Truly," returned Don José cautiously, "there is my brother and friend Roberto."

"Ah! Roberto, certainly," said Mr. Hamlin profoundly.

"Why do you ask, considerate friend?"

"Oh! I only thought, with your kind of opinions, you must often feel lonely in California. Good-bye." He shook Don José's hand heartily, took up his hat, inclined his head with graceful seriousness, and

passed out of the room. In the hall he met the landlord.

"Well," said Jenkinson, with a smile half anxious half insinuating, "you saw him? What do you think of him?"

Mr. Hamlin paused and regarded Jenkinson with a calmly contemplative air, as if he were trying to remember first who he was, and secondly why he should speak to him at all. "Think of whom?" he repeated carelessly.

"Why him—you know—Don José."

"I did not see anything the matter with him," returned Hamlin with frigid simplicity.

"What? nothing queer?"

"Well, no—except that he's a guest in *your* house," said Hamlin with great cheerfulness. "But then, as you keep a hotel, you can't help occasionally admitting a—gentleman."

Mr. Jenkinson smiled the uneasy smile of a man who knew that his interlocutor's playfulness occasionally extended to the use of a derringer, in which he was singularly prompt and proficient, and Mr. Hamlin, equally conscious of that knowledge on the part of his companion, descended the staircase composedly.

But the day had darkened gradually into night,

and Don José was at last compelled to put aside his volume. The sound of a large bell rung violently along the hall and passages admonished him that the American dinner was ready, and although the viands and the mode of cooking were not entirely to his fancy, he had, in his grave enthusiasm for the national habits, attended the *table d'hôte* regularly with Roberto. On reaching the lower hall he was informed that his henchman had early succumbed to the potency of his libations, and had already been carried by two men to bed. Receiving this information with his usual stoical composure, he entered the dining-room, but was surprised to find that a separate table had been prepared for him by the landlord, and that a rude attempt had been made to serve him with his own native dishes.

"Señores y Señoritos," said Don José, turning from it and with grave politeness addressing the assembled company, "if I seem to-day to partake alone and in a reserved fashion of certain viands that have been prepared for me, it is truly from no lack of courtesy to your distinguished company, but rather, I protest, to avoid the appearance of greater discourtesy to our excellent Jenkinson, who has taken some pains and trouble to comport his establishment to what he conceives to be my desires.

Wherefore, my friends, in God's name fall to, the same as if I were not present, and grace be with you."

A few stared at the tall, gentle, melancholy figure with some astonishment; a few whispered to their neighbours, but when, at the conclusion of his repast, Don José arose and again saluted the company, one or two stood up and smilingly returned the courtesy, and Polly Jenkinson, the landlord's youngest daughter, to the great delight of her companions, blew him a kiss.

After visiting the *vaquero* in his room, and with his own hand applying some native ointment to the various contusions and scratches which recorded the late engagements of the unconscious Roberto, Don José placed a gold coin in the hands of the Irish chambermaid, and bidding her look after the sleeper, he threw his *serape* over his shoulders and passed into the road. The loungers on the verandah gazed at him curiously, yet half acknowledged his usual serious salutation, and made way for him with a certain respect. Avoiding the few narrow streets of the little town, he pursued his way meditatively along the high road, returning to the hotel after an hour's ramble, as the evening stage-coach had deposited its passengers and departed.

"There's a lady waiting to see you upstairs," said the landlord with a peculiar smile. "She rather allowed it wasn't the proper thing to see you alone, or she wasn't quite ekal to it, I reckon, for she got my Polly to stand by her."

"Your Polly, good Jenkinson?" said Don José interrogatively.

"My darter, Don José."

"Ah, truly! I am twice blessed," said Don José, gravely ascending the staircase.

On entering the room he perceived a tall large-featured woman with an extraordinary quantity of blonde hair parted on one side of her broad forehead, sitting upon the sofa. Beside her sat Polly Jenkinson, her fresh, honest, and rather pretty face beaming with delighted expectation and mischief. Don José saluted them with a formal courtesy which, however, had no trace of the fact that he really did not remember anything of them.

"I called," said the large-featured woman with a voice equally pronounced, "in reference to a request from you, which, though perhaps unconventional in the extreme, I have been able to meet by the intervention of this young lady's company. My name on this card may not be familiar to you—but I am 'Dorothy Dewdrop.'"

A slight movement of abstraction and surprise passed over Don José's face, but as quickly vanished as he advanced towards her and gracefully raised the tips of her fingers to his lips. "Have I then, at last, the privilege of beholding that most distressed and deeply injured of women! Or is it but a dream!"

It certainly was not, as far as concerned the substantial person of the woman before him, who, however, seemed somewhat uneasy under his words as well as the demure scrutiny of Miss Jenkinson. "I thought you might have forgotten," she said with slight acerbity, "that you desired an interview with the authoress of——"

"Pardon," interrupted Don José, standing before her in an attitude of the deepest sympathising dejection, "I had not forgotten. It is now three weeks since I have read in the journal *Golden Gate* the eloquent and touching poem of your sufferings, and your aspirations, and your miscomprehensions by those you love. I remember as yesterday that you have said, that cruel fate have linked you to a soulless state—that—but I speak not well your own beautiful language—you are in tears at evenfall 'because that you are not understood of others, and that your soul recoiled from iron bonds, until, as in a dream,

you sought succour and release in some true Knight of equal plight.'"

"I am told," said the large-featured woman with some satisfaction, "that the poem to which you allude has been generally admired."

"Admired! Señora," said Don José, with still darker sympathy, "it is not the word; it is *felt.* I have felt it. When I read those words of distress, I am touched of compassion! I have said, This woman, so disconsolate, so oppressed, must be relieved, protected! I have wrote to you, at the *Golden Gate*, to see me here."

"And I have come, as you perceive," said the poetess, rising with a slight smile of constraint; "and, emboldened by your appreciation, I have brought a few trifles thrown off——"

"Pardon, unhappy Señora," interrupted Don José, lifting his hand deprecatingly without relaxing his melancholy precision, "but to a cavalier further evidence is not required—and I have not yet make finish. I have not content myself to *write* to you. I have sent my trusty friend Roberto to inquire at the *Golden Gate* of your condition. I have found there, most unhappy and persecuted friend—that with truly angelic forbearance, you have not told *all*

—that you are *married,* and that of a necessity it is your husband that is cold and soulless and unsympathising—and all that you describe."

"Sir!" said the poetess, rising in angry consternation.

"I have written to him," continued Don José, with unheeding gravity; "have appealed to him as a friend, I have conjured him as a *caballero,* I have threatened him even as a champion of the Right, I have said to him, in effect—that this must not be as it is. I have informed him that I have made an appointment with you even at this house, and I challenged him to meet you here—in this room—even at this instant, and, with God's help, we should make good our charges against him. It is yet early; I have allowed time for the lateness of the stage and the fact that he will come by another conveyance. Therefore, oh Doña Dewdrop, tremble not like thy namesake as it were on the leaf of apprehension and expectancy. I, Don José, am here to protect thee. I will take these charges"—gently withdrawing the manuscripts from her astonished grasp—"though even, as I related to thee before, I want them not, yet we will together confront him with them and make them good against him."

"Are you mad?" demanded the lady in almost

stentorious accents, "or is this an unmanly hoax?" Suddenly she stopped in undeniable consternation. "Good heavens," she muttered, "if Abner should believe this. He is *such* a fool! He has lately been queer and jealous. Oh dear!" she said, turning to Polly Jenkinson with the first indication of feminine weakness, "*is* he telling the truth? is he crazy? what shall I do?"

Polly Jenkinson, who had witnessed the interview with the intensest enjoyment, now rose equal to the occasion.

"You have made a mistake," she said, uplifting her demure blue eyes to Don José's dark and melancholy gaze. "This lady is a *poetess!* The sufferings she depicts, the sorrows she feels, are in the *imagination,* in her fancy only."

"Ah!" said Don José gloomily, "then it is all false."

"No," said Polly quickly, "only they are not her *own,* you know. They are somebody else's. She only describes them for another, don't you see?"

"And who then is this unhappy one?" asked the Don quickly.

"Well — a — friend," stammered Polly hesitatingly.

"A friend!" repeated Don José. "Ah, I see, of possibility a dear one, even," he continued, gazing with tender melancholy into the untroubled cerulean depths of Polly's eyes, "even, but no, child, it could not be! *thou* art too young."

"Ah," said Polly, with an extraordinary gulp and a fierce nudge of the poetess, "but it *was* me."

"You, Señorita," repeated Don José, falling back in an attitude of mingled admiration and pity. "You, the child of Jenkinson!"

"Yes, yes," joined in the poetess hurriedly, "but that isn't going to stop the consequences of your wretched blunder. My husband will be furious, and will be here at any moment. Good gracious! what is that?"

The violent slamming of a distant door at that instant, the sounds of quick scuffling on the staircase, and the uplifting of an irate voice had reached her ears and thrown her back in the arms of Polly Jenkinson. Even the young girl herself turned an anxious gaze towards the door. Don José alone was unmoved.

"Possess yourselves in peace, Señoritas," he said calmly. "We have here only the characteristic convalescence of my friend and brother, the excellent

Roberto. He will ever recover himself from drink with violence, even as he precipitates himself into it with fury. He has been prematurely awakened. I will discover the cause."

With an elaborate bow to the frightened women, he left the room. Scarcely had the door closed when the poetess turned quickly to Polly. "The man's a stark staring lunatic, but, thank Heaven, Abner will see it at once. And now let's get away while we can. To think," she said, snatching up her scattered manuscripts, "that *that* was all the beast wanted."

"I'm sure he's very gentle and kind," said Polly, recovering her dimples with a demure pout; "but stop, he's coming back."

It was indeed Don José re-entering the room with the composure of a relieved and self-satisfied mind. "It is even as I said, Señora," he began, taking the poetess's hand, "and *more*. You are *saved!*"

As the women only stared at each other, he gravely folded his arms and continued: "I will explain. For the instant I have not remember that in imitation of your own delicacy, I have given to your husband in my letter not the name of myself, but,

as a mere *Don Fulano,* the name of my brother Roberto—'Bucking Bob.' Your husband have this moment arrive! Penetrating the bedroom of the excellent Roberto, he has indiscreetly seize him in his bed, without explanation, without introduction, without fear! The excellent Roberto, ever ready for such distractions, have respond! In a word, to use the language of the good Jenkinson—our host, our father—who was present, he have 'wiped the floor with your husband,' and have even carried him down the staircase to the street. Believe me, he will not return. You are free!"

"Fool! Idiot! Crazy beast!" said the poetess, dashing past him and out of the door. "You shall pay for this!"

Don José did not change his imperturbable and melancholy calm. "And now, little one," he said, dropping on one knee before the half-frightened Polly, "child of Jenkinson, now that thy perhaps too excitable sponsor has, in a poet's caprice, abandoned thee for some newer fantasy, confide in me thy distress, to me, thy Knight, and tell the story of thy sorrows."

"But," said Polly, rising to her feet and struggling between a laugh and a cry. "I haven't any sorrows.

Oh dear! don't you see, it's only her *fancy* to make me seem so. There's nothing the matter with me."

"Nothing the matter," repeated Don José slowly. "You have no distress? You want no succour, no relief, no protector? This then is but another delusion!" he said, rising sadly.

"Yes, no—that is—oh, my gracious goodness!" said Polly, hopelessly divided between a sense of the ridiculous and some strange attraction in the dark gentle eyes that were fixed upon her half reproachfully. "You don't understand."

Don José replied only with a melancholy smile, and then going to the door, opened it with a bowed head and respectful courtesy. At the act, Polly plucked up courage again, and with it a slight dash of her old audacity.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry that I ain't got any love sorrows," she said demurely. "And I suppose it's very dreadful in me not to have been raving and broken-hearted over somebody or other as that woman has said. Only," she waited till she had gained the secure vantage of the threshold, "I never knew a gentleman to *object* to it before!"

With this Parthian arrow from her blue eyes she slipped into the passage and vanished through the door of the opposite parlour. For an instant Don

José remained motionless and reflecting. Then, recovering himself with grave precision, he deliberately picked up his narrow black gloves from the table, drew them on, took his hat in his hand, and solemnly striding across the passage, entered the door that had just closed behind her.

III.

It must not be supposed that in the meantime the flight of Don José and his follower was unattended by any commotion at the Rancho of the Blessed Innocents. At the end of three hours' deliberation, in which the retainers were severally examined, the corral searched, and the well in the courtyard sounded, scouts were despatched in different directions, who returned with the surprising information that the fugitives were not in the vicinity. A trustworthy messenger was sent to Monterey for "custom-house paper," on which to draw up a formal declaration of the affair. The archbishop was summoned from San Luis, and Don Victor and Don Vincente Sepulvida, with the Doñas Carmen and Inez Alvarado, and a former alcalde gathered at a family council the next day. In this serious conclave the good Father Felipe once more expounded the alienated condition and the dangerous reading of the absent man. In the midst of which the ordinary post brought a letter from Don José, calmly inviting the family to

dine with him and Roberto at San Mateo on the following Wednesday. The document was passed gravely from hand to hand. Was it a fresh evidence of mental aberration—an audacity of frenzy—or a trick of the vaquero? The archbishop and alcalde shook their heads—it was without doubt a lawless —even a sacrilegious and blasphemous *fête*. But a certain curiosity of the ladies and of Father Felipe carried the day. Without formally accepting the invitation it was decided that the family should examine the afflicted man, with a view of taking active measures hereafter. On the day appointed, the travelling carriage of the Sepulvidas, an equipage coeval with the beginning of the century, drawn by two white mules gaudily caparisoned, halted before the hotel at San Mateo and disgorged Father Felipe, the Doñas Carmen and Inez Alvaredo and Maria Sepulvida, while Don Victor and Don Vincente Sepulvida, their attendant cavaliers on fiery mustangs, like outriders, drew rein at the same time. A slight thrill of excitement, as of the advent of a possible circus, had preceded them through the little town, a faint blending of cigarette smoke and garlic announced their presence on the verandah.

Ushered into the parlour of the hotel, apparently set apart for their reception, they were embarrassed

at not finding their host present. But they were still more disconcerted when a tall full-bearded stranger, with a shrewd amused-looking face, rose from a chair by the window, and stepping forward, saluted them in fluent Spanish with a slight American accent.

"I have to ask you, gentlemen and ladies," he began, with a certain insinuating ease and frankness that alternately aroused and lulled their suspicions, "to pardon the absence of our friend Don José Sepulvida at this preliminary greeting. For to be perfectly frank with you, although the ultimate aim and object of our gathering is a social one, you are doubtless aware that certain infelicities and misunderstandings—common to most families—have occurred, and a free, dispassionate, unprejudiced discussion and disposal of them at the beginning will only tend to augment the goodwill of our gathering."

"The Señor without doubt is——" suggested the padre, with a polite interrogative pause.

"Pardon me! I forgot to introduce myself. Colonel Parker—entirely at your service and that of these charming ladies."

The ladies referred to allowed their eyes to rest

with evident prepossession on the insinuating stranger. "Ah, a soldier," said Don Vincente.

"Formerly," said the American lightly, "at present a lawyer, the counsel of Don José."

A sudden rigour of suspicion stiffened the company; the ladies withdrew their eyes; the priest and the Sepulvidas exchanged glances.

"Come," said Colonel Parker, with apparent unconsciousness of the effect of his disclosure, "let us begin frankly. You have, I believe, some anxiety in regard to the mental condition of Don José."

"We believe him to be mad," said Padre Felipe promptly, "irresponsible, possessed!"

"That is your opinion, good," said the lawyer quietly.

"And ours too," clamoured the party, "without doubt."

"Good," returned the lawyer with perfect cheerfulness. "As his relations, you have no doubt had superior opportunities for observing his condition. I understand also that you may think it necessary to have him legally declared *non compos,* a proceeding which, you are aware, might result in the incarceration of our distinguished friend in a mad-house."

"Pardon, Señor," interrupted Doña Maria proudly, "you do not comprehend the family. When a

Sepulvida is visited of God we do not ask the Government to confine him like a criminal. We protect him in his own house from the consequences of his frenzy."

"From the machinations of the worldly and heretical," broke in the priest, "and from the waste and dispersion of inherited possessions."

"Very true," continued Colonel Parker, with unalterable good humour, "but I was only about to say that there might be conflicting evidence of his condition. For instance, our friend has been here three days. In that time he has had three interviews with three individuals under singular circumstances." Colonel Parker then briefly recounted the episodes of the landlord, the gambler, Miss Jenkinson and the poetess as they had been related to him. "Yet," he continued, "all but one of these individuals are willing to swear that they not only believe Don José perfectly sane, but endowed with a singularly sound judgment. In fact, the testimony of Mr. Hamlin and Miss Jenkinson is remarkably clear on that subject."

The company exchanged a supercilious smile. "Do you not see, oh Señor Advocate," said Don Vincente compassionately, "that this is but a conspiracy to avail themselves of our relative's weak-

ness. Of a necessity they find him sane who benefits them."

"I have thought of that, and am glad to hear you say so," returned the lawyer still more cheerfully, "for your prompt opinion emboldens me to be at once perfectly frank with you. Briefly then, Don José has summoned me here to make a final disposition of his property. In the carrying out of certain theories of his, which it is not my province to question, he has resolved upon comparative poverty for himself as best fitted for his purpose, and to employ his wealth solely for others. In fact, of all his vast possessions, he retains for himself only an income sufficient for the bare necessaries of life."

"And you have done this?" they asked in one voice.

"Not yet," said the lawyer.

"Blessed San Antonio, we have come in time," ejaculated Doña Carmen. "Another day and it would have been too late, it was an inspiration of the Blessed Innocents themselves," said Doña Maria, crossing herself. "Can you longer doubt that this is the wildest madness?" said Father Felipe with flashing eyes.

"Yet," returned the lawyer, caressing his heavy

beard with a meditative smile, "the ingenious fellow actually instanced the vows of *your own order*, reverend sir, as an example in support of his theory. But to be brief. Conceiving then that his holding of property was a mere accident of heritage, not admitted by him, unworthy his acceptance, and a relic of superstitious ignorance——"

"This is the very sacrilege of Satanic prepossession," broke in the priest indignantly.

"He therefore," continued the lawyer composedly, "makes over and reverts the whole of his possessions, with the exceptions I have stated, to his family and the Church."

A breathless and stupefying silence fell upon the company. In the dead hush the sound of Polly Jenkinson's piano played in a distant room could be distinctly heard. With their vacant eyes staring at him the speaker continued—

"That deed of gift I have drawn up as he dictated it. I don't mind saying that in the opinion of some he might be declared *non compos* upon the evidence of that alone. I need not say how relieved I am to find that your opinion coincides with my own."

"But," gasped Father Felipe hurriedly, with a quick glance at the others, "it does not follow that

it will be necessary to resort to these legal measures, —care, counsel, persuasion."

"The general ministering of kinship—nursing, a woman's care—the instincts of affection," piped Doña Maria in breathless eagerness.

"Any light social distraction—a harmless flirtation —a possible attachment," suggested Doña Carmen shyly.

"Change of scene—active exercise—experiences —even as those you have related," broke in Don Vincente.

"I for one have ever been opposed to *legal* measures," said Don Victor. "A mere consultation of friends—in fact a *fête* like this is sufficient."

"Good friends," said Father Felipe, who had by this time recovered himself, taking out his snuff-box portentously, "it would seem truly from the document which this discreet *caballero* has spoken of, that the errors of our dear Don José are rather of method than intent, and that while we may freely accept the one——"

"Pardon," interrupted Colonel Parker with bland persistence, "but I must point out to you that what we call in law 'a consideration' is necessary to the legality of a conveyance, even though that considera-

tion be frivolous and calculated to impair the validity of the document."

"Truly," returned the good padre insinuatingly, "but if a discreet advocate were to suggest the substitution of some more pious and reasonable consideration——"

"But that would be making it a perfectly sane and gratuitous document, not only glaringly inconsistent with your charges, my good friends, with Don José's attitude towards you and his flight from home, but open to the gravest suspicion in law. In fact its apparent propriety in the face of these facts would imply improper influence."

The countenances of the company fell. The lawyer's face, however, became still more good-humoured and sympathising. "The case is simply this. If in the opinion of judge and jury Don José is declared insane, the document is worthless except as a proof of that fact or a possible indication of the undue influence of his relations, which might compel the court to select his guardians and trustees elsewhere than among them."

"Friend Abogado," said Father Felipe with extraordinary deliberation, "the document thou hast just described so eloquently convinces me beyond all doubt that Don José is not only perfectly sane but

endowed with a singular discretion. I consider it as a delicate and high-spirited intimation to us, his friends and kinsmen, of his unalterable and logically just devotion to his family and religion, whatever may seem to be his poetical and imaginative manner of declaring it. I think there is not one here," continued the padre, looking around him impressively "who is not entirely satisfied of Don José's reason and competency to arrange his own affairs."

"Entirely," "truly," "perfectly," eagerly responded the others with affecting spontaneity.

"Nay, more. To prevent any misconception, we shall deem it our duty to take every opportunity of making our belief publicly known," added Father Felipe.

The Padre and Colonel Parker gazed long and gravely into each other's eyes. It may have been an innocent touch of the sunlight through the window, but a faint gleam seemed to steal into the pupil of the affable lawyer at the same moment that, probably from the like cause, there was a slight nervous contraction of the left eyelid of the pious father. But it passed and the next instant the door opened to admit Don José Sepulvida.

He was at once seized and effusively embraced

by the entire company with every protest of affection and respect. Not only Mr. Hamlin and Mr. Jenkinson, who accompanied him as invited guests, but Roberto in a new suit of clothes and guiltless of stain or trace of dissipation, shared in the pronounced friendliness of the kinsmen. Padre Felipe took snuff, Colonel Parker blew his nose gently.

Nor were they less demonstrative of their new convictions later at the banquet. Don José, with Jenkinson and the padre on his right and left, preserved his gentle and half-melancholy dignity in the midst of the noisy fraternisation. Even Padre Felipe, in a brief speech or exhortation proposing the health of their host, lent himself in his own tongue to this polite congeniality. "We have had also, my friends and brothers," he said in peroration, "a pleasing example of the compliment of imitation shown by our beloved Don José. No one who has known him during his friendly sojourn in this community but will be struck with the conviction that he has acquired that most marvellous faculty of your great American nation, the exhibition of humour and of the practical joke."

Every eye was turned upon the imperturbable face of Don José as he slowly rose to reply. "In bidding you to this *fête,* my friends and kinsmen,"

he began calmly, "it was with the intention of formally embracing the habits, customs, and spirit of American institutions by certain methods of renunciation of the past, as became a *caballero* of honour and resolution. Those methods may possibly be known to some of you." He paused for a moment as if to allow the members of his family to look unconscious. "Since then, in the wisdom of God, it has occurred to me that my purpose may be as honourably effected by a discreet blending of the past and the present—in a word, by the judicious combination of the interests of my native people and the American nation. In consideration of that purpose, friends and kinsmen, I ask you to join me in drinking the good health of my host Señor Jenkinson, my future father-in-law, from whom I have to-day had the honour to demand the hand of the peerless Polly, his daughter, as the future mistress of the Rancho of the Blessed Innocents."

The marriage took place shortly after. Nor was the free will and independence of Don José Sepulvida in the least opposed by his relations. Whether they felt they had already committed themselves, or had hopes in the future, did not transpire. Enough that the escapade of a week was tacitly forgotten. The

only allusion ever made to the bridegroom's peculiarities was drawn from the demure lips of the bride herself on her installation at the "Blessed Innocents."

"And what, little one, didst thou find in me to admire?" Don José had asked tenderly.

"Oh, you seemed to be so much like that dear old Don Quixote, you know," she answered demurely.

"Don Quixote," repeated Don José with gentle gravity. "But, my child, that was only a mere fiction —a romance, of one Cervantes. Believe me, of a truth there never was any such person!"

A SECRET OF TELEGRAPH HILL.

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I.

As Mr. Herbert Bly glanced for the first time at the house which was to be his future abode in San Francisco, he was somewhat startled. In that early period of feverish civic improvement the street before it had been repeatedly graded and lowered until the dwelling—originally a pioneer suburban villa perched upon a slope of Telegraph Hill—now stood sixty feet above the side-walk, superposed like some Swiss châlet on successive galleries built in the sand-hill, and connected by a half-dozen distinct zigzag flights of wooden staircase. Stimulated, however, by the thought that the view from the top would be a fine one, and that existence there would have all the quaint originality of Robinson Crusoe's tree-dwelling, Mr. Bly began cheerfully to mount the steps. It should be premised that, although a

recently appointed clerk in a large banking house, Mr. Bly was somewhat youthful and imaginative, and regarded the ascent as part of that "Excelsior" climbing pointed out by a great poet as a praiseworthy function of ambitious youth.

Reaching at last the level of the verandah he turned to the view. The distant wooded shore of Contra Costa, the tossing white caps and dancing sails of the bay between, and the foreground at his feet of wharves and piers, with their reed-like jungles of masts and cordage, made up a bright, if somewhat material, picture. To his right rose the crest of the hill, historic and memorable as the site of the old semaphoric telegraph, the tossing of whose gaunt arms formerly thrilled the citizens with tidings from the sea. Turning to the house, he recognised the prevailing style of light cottage architecture, although incongruously confined to narrow building plots and the civic regularity of a precise street frontage. Thus a dozen other villas, formerly scattered over the slope, had been laboriously displaced and moved to the rigorous parade line drawn by the street surveyor, no matter how irregular and independent their design and structure. Happily, the few "scrub oaks" and low bushes which formed the scant vegetation of this vast sand dune offered

no obstacle and suggested no incongruity. Beside the house before which Mr. Bly now stood, a prolific Madeira vine, quickened by the six months' sunshine, had alone survived the displacement of its foundations, and in its untrimmed luxuriance half hid the upper verandah from his view.

Still glowing with his exertion, the young man rang the bell and was admitted into a fair-sized drawing-room, whose tasteful and well-arranged furniture at once propossessed him. An open piano, a sheet of music carelessly left on the stool, a novel lying face downwards on the table beside a skein of silk, and the distant rustle of a vanished skirt through an inner door, gave a suggestion of refined domesticity to the room that touched the fancy of the homeless and nomadic Bly. He was still enjoying, in half embarrassment, that vague and indescribable atmosphere of a refined woman's habitual presence, when the door opened and the mistress of the house formally presented herself.

She was a faded but still handsome woman. Yet she wore that peculiar long, limp, formless house-shawl which in certain phases of Anglo-Saxon spinster and widowhood assumes the functions of the recluse's veil and announces the renunciation of worldly vanities and a resigned indifference to ex-

ternal feminine contour. The most audacious masculine arm would shrink from clasping that shapeless void in which the flatness of asceticism or the heavings of passion might alike lie buried. She had also in some mysterious way imported into the fresh and pleasant room a certain bombaziny shadow of the past, and a suggestion of that appalling reminiscence known as "better days." Though why it should be always represented by ashen memories, or why better days in the past should be supposed to fix their fitting symbol in depression in the present, Mr. Bly was too young and too preoccupied at the moment to determine. He only knew that he was a little frightened of her, and fixed his gaze with a hopeless fascination on a letter which she somewhat portentously carried under the shawl, and which seemed already to have yellowed in its Arctic shade.

"Mr. Carstone has written to me that you would call," said Mrs. Brooks with languid formality. "Mr. Carstone was a valued friend of my late husband, and I suppose has told you the circumstances—the only circumstances—which admit of my entertaining his proposition of taking anybody, even temporarily under my roof. The absence of my dear son for six months at Portland, Oregon, enables me to

place his room at the disposal of Mr. Carstone's young protégé, who, Mr. Carstone tells me, and I have every reason to believe, is, if perhaps not so seriously inclined nor yet a Church communicant, still of a character and reputation not unworthy to follow my dear Tappington in our little family circle as he has at his desk in the bank."

The sensitive Bly, struggling painfully out of an abstraction as to how he was ever to offer the weekly rent of his lodgings to such a remote and respectable person, and also somewhat embarrassed at being appealed to in the third person, here started and bowed.

"The name of Bly is not unfamiliar to me," continued Mrs. Brooks, pointing to a chair and sinking resignedly into another, where her baleful shawl at once assumed the appearance of a dust-cover; "some of my dearest friends were intimate with the Blys of Philadelphia. They were a branch of the Maryland Blys of the eastern shore, one of whom my Uncle James married. Perhaps you are distantly related?"

Mrs. Brooks was perfectly aware that her visitor was of unknown western origin, and a poor but clever protégé of the rich banker; but she was one of a certain class of American women who, in the midst of a fierce democracy, are more or less cat-

like conservators of family pride and lineage, and more or less felinely inconsistent and treacherous to Republican principles. Bly, who had just settled in his mind to send her the rent anonymously—as a weekly valentine—recovered himself and his spirits in his usual boyish fashion.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Brooks," he said gaily, "I cannot lay claim to any distinguished relationship, even to that 'Nelly Bly' who, you remember, 'winked her eye when she went to sleep.'" He stopped in consternation. The terrible conviction flashed upon him that this quotation from a popular negro-minstrel song could not possibly be "remembered" by a lady as refined as his hostess, or even known to her superior son. The conviction was intensified by Mrs. Brooks rising with a smileless face, slightly shedding the possible vulgarity with a shake of her shawl, and remarking that she would show him her son's room, led the way upstairs to the apartment recently vacated by the perfect Tappington.

Preceded by the same distant flutter of unseen skirts in the passage which he had first noticed on entering the drawing room, and which evidently did not proceed from his companion, whose self-composed cerements would have repressed any such indecorous

agitation, Mr. Bly stepped timidly into the room. It was a very pretty apartment, suggesting the same touches of tasteful refinement in its furniture and appointments, and withal so feminine in its neatness and regularity, that, conscious of his frontier habits and experience, he felt at once repulsively incongruous. "I cannot expect, Mr. Bly," said Mrs. Brooks resignedly, "that you can share my son's extreme sensitiveness to disorder and irregularity; but I must beg you to avoid as much as possible disturbing the arrangement of the book-shelves, which, you observe, comprise his books of serious reference, the Biblical commentaries, and the sermons that were his habitual study. I must beg you to exercise the same care in reference to the valuable offerings from his Sabbath-school scholars, which are upon the mantel. The embroidered book-marker, the gift of the young ladies of his Bible-class in Dr. Stout's church, is also, you perceive, kept for ornament and affectionate remembrance. The harmonium—even if you are not yourself given to sacred song—I trust you will not find in your way, nor object to my daughter continuing her practice during your daily absence. Thank you. The door you are looking at leads by a flight of steps to the side street."

"A very convenient arrangement," said Bly hope-

fully, who saw a chance for an occasional unostentatious escape from a too-protracted contemplation of Tappington's perfections. "I mean," he added hurriedly, "to avoid disturbing you at night."

"I believe my son had neither the necessity nor desire to use it for that purpose," returned Mrs. Brooks severely; "although he found it sometimes a convenient short cut to church on Sabbath when he was late."

Bly, who in his boyish sensitiveness to external impressions had by this time concluded that a life divided between the past perfections of Tappington and the present renunciations of Mrs. Brooks would be intolerable, and was again abstractedly inventing some delicate excuse for withdrawing without committing himself further, was here suddenly attracted by a repetition of the rustling of the unseen skirt. This time it was nearer, and this time it seemed to strike even Mrs. Brooks's remote preoccupation. "My daughter, who is deeply devoted to her brother," she said, slightly raising her voice, "will take upon herself the care of looking after Tappington's precious mementoes, and spare you the trouble. Cherry, dear! this way. This is the young gentleman spoken of by Mr. Carstone, your papa's friend. My daughter Cherubina, Mr. Bly."

The fair owner of the rustling skirt, which turned out to be a pretty French print, had appeared at the doorway. She was a tall slim blonde, with a shy startled manner, as of a penitent nun who was suffering for some conventual transgression—a resemblance that was heightened by her short-cut hair, that might have been cropped as if for punishment. A certain likeness to her mother suggested that she was qualifying for that saint's ascetic shawl—subject, however, to rebellious intervals, indicated in the occasional sidelong fires of her gray eyes. Yet the vague impression that she knew more of the world than her mother, and that she did not look at all as if her name was Cherubina, struck Bly in the same momentary glance.

"Mr. Bly is naturally pleased with what he has seen of our dear Tappington's appointments; and as I gather from Mr. Carstone's letter that he is anxious to enter at once and make the most of the dear boy's absence, you will see, my dear Cherry, that Ellen has everything ready for him?"

Before the unfortunate Bly could explain or protest, the young girl lifted her gray eyes to his. Whether she had perceived and understood his perplexity he could not tell; but the swift shy glance was at once appealing, assuring, and intelligent. She

was certainly unlike her mother and brother! Acting with his usual impulsiveness, he forgot his previous resolution, and before he left had engaged to begin his occupation of the room on the following day.

The next afternoon found him installed. Yet, after he had unpacked his modest possessions and put them away, after he had placed his few books on the shelves, where they looked glaringly trivial and frivolous beside the late tenant's severe studies; after he had set out his scanty treasures in the way of photographs and some curious mementoes of his wandering life, and then quickly put them back again with a sudden angry pride at exposing them to the unsympathetic incongruity of the other ornaments, he, nevertheless, felt ill at ease. He glanced in vain around the pretty room. It was not the delicately flowered wall-paper; it was not the white and blue muslin window-curtains gracefully tied up with blue and white ribbons; it was not the spotless bed, with its blue and white festooned mosquito-net and flounced valences, and its medallion portrait of an unknown bishop at the back; it was not the few tastefully framed engravings of certain cardinal virtues, "The Rock of Ages," and "The Guardian Angel"; it was not the casts in relief of "Night" and "Morning"; it was certainly not the cosy dimity-

covered armchairs and sofa, nor yet the clean-swept polished grate with its cheerful fire sparkling against the chill afternoon sea-fogs without. Neither was it the mere feminine suggestion, for that touched a sympathetic cord in his impulsive nature; nor the religious and ascetic influence, for he had occupied a monastic cell in a school of the padres at an old mission, and slept profoundly;—it was none of those, and yet a part of all. Most habitations retain a cast or shell of their previous tenant that, fitting tightly or loosely, is still able to adjust itself to the new-comer; in most occupied apartments there is still a shadowy suggestion of the owner's individuality; there was nothing here that fitted Bly—nor was there either, strange to say, any evidence of the past proprietor in this inhospitality of sensation. It did not strike him at the time that it was this very *lack* of individuality which made it weird and unreal, that it was strange only because it was *artificial,* and that a *real* Tappington had never inhabited it.

He walked to the window—that never-failing resource of the unquiet mind—and looked out. He was a little surprised to find that, owing to the grading of the house, the scrub oaks and bushes of the hill were nearly on the level of his window, as also was the adjoining side street on which his second

door actually gave. Opening this, the sudden invasion of the sea-fog and the figure of a pedestrian casually passing along the disused and abandoned pavement not a dozen feet from where he had been comfortably seated, presented such a striking contrast to the studious quiet and cosiness of his secluded apartment that he hurriedly closed the door again with a sense of indiscreet exposure. Returning to the window, he glanced to the left, and found that he was overlooked by the side verandah of another villa in the rear, evidently on its way to take position on the line of the street. Although in actual and deliberate transit on rollers across the backyard and still occulting a part of the view, it remained, after the reckless fashion of the period, inhabited. Certainly, with a door fronting a thoroughfare, and a neighbour gradually approaching him, he would not feel lonely or lack excitement.

He drew his arm-chair to the fire and tried to realise the all-pervading yet evasive Tappington. There was no portrait of him in the house, and although Mrs. Brooks had said that he "favoured" his sister, Bly had, without knowing why, instinctively resented it. He had even timidly asked his employer, and had received the vague reply that he

was "good-looking enough," and the practical but discomposing retort, "What do you want to know for?" As he really did not know why, the inquiry had dropped. He stared at the monumental crystal inkstand half full of ink, yet spotless and free from stains, that stood on the table, and tried to picture Tappington daintily dipping into it to thank the fair donors—"daughters of Rebecca." Who were they? and what sort of man would they naturally feel grateful to?

What was that?

He turned to the window, which had just resounded to a slight tap or blow, as if something soft had struck it. With an instinctive suspicion of the propinquity of the adjoining street, he rose, but a single glance from the window satisfied him that no missile would have reached it from thence. He scanned the low bushes on the level before him; certainly no one could be hiding there. He lifted his eyes towards the house on the left; the curtains of the nearest window appeared to be drawn suddenly at the same moment. Could it have come from there? Looking down upon the window-ledge, there lay the mysterious missile—a little misshapen ball. He opened the window and took it up. It was a small handkerchief tied into a soft knot, and

dampened with water to give it the necessary weight as a projectile.

Was it apparently the trick of a mischievous child? or——

But here a faint knock on the door leading into the hall checked his inquiry. He opened it sharply in his excitement, and was embarrassed to find the daughter of his hostess standing there, shy, startled, and evidently equally embarrassed by his abrupt response.

"Mother only wanted me to ask you if Ellen had put everything to rights," she said, making a step backwards.

"Oh, thank you. Perfectly," said Herbert with effusion. "Nothing could be better done. In fact——"

"You're quite sure she hasn't forgotten anything? or that there isn't anything you would like changed?" she continued, with her eyes levelled on the floor.

"Nothing, I assure you," he said, looking at her downcast lashes. As she still remained motionless, he continued cheerfully, "Would you—would you—care to look round and see?"

"No; I thank you."

There was an awkward pause. He still continued to hold the door open. Suddenly, she moved

forward with a school-girl stride, entered the room, and going to the harmonium, sat down upon the music-stool beside it, slightly bending forward, with one long, slim, white hand on top of the other, resting over her crossed knees.

Herbert was a little puzzled. It was the awkward and brusque act of a very young person, and yet nothing now could be more gentle and self-composed than her figure and attitude.

"Yes," he continued smilingly; "I am only afraid that I may not be able to live quite up to the neatness and regularity of the example I find here everywhere. You know I am dreadfully careless and not at all orderly. I shudder to think what may happen; but you and your mother, Miss Brooks, I trust, will make up your minds to overlook and forgive a good deal. I shall do my best to be worthy of Mr. Tap —of my predecessor—but even then I am afraid you'll find me a great bother."

She raised her shy eyelids. The faintest ghost of a long buried dimple came into her pale cheek as she said softly, to his utter consternation—

"Rats!"

Had she uttered an oath he could not have been more startled than he was by this choice gem of western saloon-slang from the pure lips of this

Evangeline-like figure before him. He sat gazing at her with a wild hysteric desire to laugh. She lifted her eyes again, swept him with a slightly terrified glance, and said—

"Tap says you all say that when any one makes-believe politeness to you."

"Oh, your *brother* says that, does he?" said Herbert, laughing.

"Yes, and sometimes 'old rats.' But," she continued hurriedly, "*he* doesn't say it. He says *you* all do. My brother is very particular, and very good. Doctor Stout loves him. He is thought very much of in all Christian circles. That bookmark was given to him by one of his classes."

Every trace of her dimples had vanished. She looked so sweetly grave, and withal so maidenly, sitting there slightly smoothing the lengths of her pink fingers, that Herbert was somewhat embarrassed.

"But I assure you, Miss Brooks, I was not making-believe. I am really very careless, and everything is so proper—I mean so neat and pretty—here that I——" he stopped, and observing the same backward wandering of her eye as of a filly about to shy, quickly changed the subject. "You have, or are about to have, neighbours?" he said,

glancing towards the windows as he recalled the incident of a moment before.

"Yes; and they're not at all nice people. They are from Pike County, and very queer. They came across the plains in '50. They say 'Stranger'; the men are vulgar, and the girls very forward. Tap forbids my ever going to the window and looking at them. They're quite what you would call 'off colour.'"

Herbert, who did not dare to say that he never would have dreamed of using such an expression in any young girl's presence, was plunged in silent consternation.

"Then your brother doesn't approve of them?" he said, at last, awkwardly.

"Oh, not at all. He even talked of having ground-glass put in all these windows, only it would make the light bad."

Herbert felt very embarrassed. If the mysterious missile came from these objectionable young persons it was evidently because they thought they had detected a more accessible and sympathising individual in the stranger who now occupied the room. He concluded he had better not say anything about it.

Miss Brooks's golden eyelashes were bent to-

wards the floor. "Do you play sacred music, Mr. Bly?" she said, without raising them.

"I am afraid not."

"Perhaps you know only negro-minstrel songs?"

"I am afraid—yes."

"I know one." The dimples faintly came back again. "It's called 'The Ham-fat Man.' Some day when mother isn't in I'll play it for you."

Then the dimples fled again, and she immediately looked so distressed that Herbert came to her assistance.

"I suppose your brother taught you that too?"

"Oh, dear, no!" she returned, with her frightened glance; "I only heard him say some people preferred that kind of thing to sacred music, and one day I saw a copy of it in a music-store window in Clay Street, and bought it. Oh no! Tappington didn't teach it to me."

In the pleasant discovery that she was at times independent of her brother's perfections, Herbert smiled, and sympathetically drew a step nearer to her. She rose at once, somewhat primly holding back the sides of her skirt, school-girl fashion, with thumb and finger, and her eyes cast down.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Bly."

"Must you go? Good afternoon."

She walked directly to the open door, looking very tall and stately as she did so, but without turning towards him. When she reached it she lifted her eyes; there was the slightest suggestion of a return of her dimples in the relaxation of her grave little mouth. Then she said, "Good-bye, Mr. Bly," and departed.

The skirt of her dress rustled for an instant in the passage. Herbert looked after her. "I wonder if she skipped then—she looks like a girl that might skip at such a time," he said to himself. "How very odd she is—and how simple! But I must pull her up in that slang when I know her better. Fancy her brother telling her *that!* What a pair they must be!" Nevertheless, when he turned back into the room again he forbore going to the window to indulge further curiosity in regard to his wicked neighbours. A certain new feeling of respect to his late companion—and possibly to himself—held him in check. Much as he resented Tappington's perfections, he resented quite as warmly the presumption that he was not quite as perfect, which was implied in that mysterious overture. He glanced at the stool on which she had been sitting with a half-brotherly smile, and put it reverently on one side with a very vivid recollection of her shy maidenly

figure. In some mysterious way too the room seemed to have lost its formal strangeness; perhaps it was the touch of individuality—*hers*—that had been wanting? He began thoughtfully to dress himself for his regular dinner at the Poodle Dog Restaurant, and when he left the room he turned back to look once more at the stool where she had sat. Even on his way to that fast and famous *café* of the period he felt, for the first time in his thoughtless but lonely life, the gentle security of the home he had left behind him.

II.

It was three or four days before he became firmly adjusted to his new quarters. During this time he had met Cherry casually on the staircase, in going or coming, and received her shy greetings; but she had not repeated her visit, nor again alluded to it. He had spent part of a formal evening in the parlour in company with a calling deacon, who, unappalled by the Indian shawl for which the widow had exchanged her household cerements on such occasions, appeared to Herbert to have remote matrimonial designs, as far at least as a sympathetic deprecation of the vanities of the present, an echoing of her sighs like a modest encore, a preternatural gentility of manner, a vague allusion to the necessity of bearing "one another's burdens," and an everlasting "promise" in store, would seem to imply. To Herbert's vivid imagination, a discussion on the doctrinal points of last Sabbath's sermon was fraught with delicate suggestion; and an acceptance by the widow of an appointment to attend the

Wednesday evening "Lectures" had all the shy reluctant yielding of a granted rendezvous. Oddly enough, the more formal attitude seemed to be reserved for the young people, who, in the suggestive atmosphere of this spiritual flirtation, alone appeared to preserve the proprieties and, to some extent, decorously chaperon their elders. Herbert gravely turned the leaves of Cherry's music while she played and sang one or two discreet but depressing songs expressive of her unalterable but proper devotion to her mother's clock, her father's arm-chair, and her aunt's Bible; and Herbert joined somewhat boyishly in the soul-subduing refrain. Only once he ventured to suggest in a whisper that he would like to add *her* music-stool to the adorable inventory; but he was met by such a disturbed and terrified look that he desisted. "Another night of this wild and reckless dissipation will finish me," he said lugubriously to himself when he reached the solitude of his room. "I wonder how many times a week I'd have to help the girl play the spiritual gooseberry downstairs before we could have any fun ourselves?"

Here the sound of distant laughter, interspersed with vivacious feminine shrieks, came through the open window. He glanced between the curtains. His neighbour's house was brilliantly lit, and the

shadows of a few romping figures were chasing each other across the muslin shades of the windows. The objectionable young women were evidently enjoying themselves. In some conditions of the mind there is a certain exasperation in the spectacle of unmeaning enjoyment, and he shut the window sharply. At the same moment some one knocked at his door.

It was Miss Brooks, who had just come upstairs.

"Will you please let me have my music-stool?"

He stared at her a moment in surprise, then recovering himself said, "Yes, certainly," and brought the stool. For an instant he was tempted to ask why she wanted it, but his pride forbade him.

"Thank you. Good-night."

"Good-night!"

"I hope it wasn't in your way?"

"Not at all."

"Good-night!"

"Good-night."

She vanished. Herbert was perplexed. Between young ladies whose naïve exuberance impelled them to throw handkerchiefs at his window and young ladies whose equally naïve modesty demanded the withdrawal from his bed-room of a chair on which they had once sat, his lot seemed to have fallen in

a troubled locality. Yet a day or two later he heard Cherry practising on the harmonium as he was ascending the stairs on his return from business; she had departed before he entered the room, but had left the music-stool behind her. It was not again removed.

One Sunday, the second or third of his tenancy, when Cherry and her mother were at church, and he had finished some work that he had brought from the bank, his former restlessness and sense of strangeness returned. The regular afternoon fog had thickened early, and driving him back from a cheerless chilly ramble on the hill, had left him still more depressed and solitary. In sheer desperation he moved some of the furniture, and changed the disposition of several smaller ornaments. Growing bolder, he even attacked the sacred shelf devoted to Tappington's serious literature and moral studies. At first glance the book of sermons looked suspiciously fresh and new for a volume of habitual reference, but its leaves were carefully cut, and contained one or two book-marks. It was only another evidence of that perfect youth's care and neatness. As he was replacing it he noticed a small object folded in white paper at the back of the shelf. To put the book back into its former position it was

necessary to take this out. He did so, but its contents slid from his fingers and the paper to the floor. To his utter consternation, looking down he saw a pack of playing cards strewn at his feet!

He hurriedly picked them up. They were worn and slippery from use, and exhaled a faint odour of tobacco. Had they been left there by some temporary visitor unknown to Tappington and his family, or had they been hastily hidden by a servant? Yet they were of a make and texture superior to those that a servant would possess; looking at them carefully he recognised them to be of a quality used by the better-class gamblers. Restoring them carefully to their former position, he was tempted to take out the other volumes, and was rewarded with the further discovery of a small box of ivory counters, known as "poker-chips." It was really very extraordinary! It was quite the *cache* of some habitual gambler. Herbert smiled grimly at the irreverent incongruity of the hiding-place selected by its unknown and mysterious owner and amused himself by fancying the horror of his sainted predecessor had *he* made the discovery. He determined to replace them, and to put some mark upon the volumes before them in order to detect any future disturbance of them in his absence.

Ought he not to take Miss Brooks in his confidence? Or should he say nothing about it at present, and trust to chance to discover the sacrilegious hider? Could it possibly be Cherry herself, guilty of the same innocent curiosity that had impelled her to buy the "Ham-fat Man"? Preposterous! Besides, the cards had been used, and she could not play poker alone!

He watched the rolling fog extinguish the line of Russian Hill, the last bit of far perspective from his window. He glanced at his neighbour's verandah, already dripping with moisture; the windows were blank; he remembered to have heard the girls giggling in passing down the side street on their way to church, and had noticed from behind his own curtains that one was rather pretty. This led him to think of Cherry again, and to recall the quaint yet melancholy grace of her figure as she sat on the stool opposite. Why had she withdrawn it so abruptly; did she consider his jesting allusion to it indecorous and presuming? Had he really meant it seriously; and was he beginning to think too much about her? Would she ever come again? How nice it would be if she returned from church alone early, and they could have a comfortable chat together here! Would she sing the "Ham-fat Man" for him?

Would the dimples come back if she did? Should he ever know more of this quaint repressed side of her nature? After all, what a dear, graceful, tantalising, lovable creature she was! Ought he not, at all hazards, try to know her better? Might it not be here that he would find a perfect realisation of his boyish dreams, and in *her* all that—what nonsense he was thinking!

Suddenly Herbert was startled by the sound of a light but hurried foot upon the wooden outer step of his second door, and the quick but ineffective turning of the door-handle. He started to his feet, his mind still filled with a vision of Cherry. Then he as suddenly remembered that he had locked the door on going out, putting the key in his overcoat pocket. He had returned by the front door, and his overcoat was now hanging in the lower hall.

The door again rattled impetuously. Then it was supplemented by a female voice in a hurried whisper: "Open quick, can't you? Do hurry!"

He was confounded. The voice was authoritative, not unmusical; but was *not* Cherry's. Nevertheless he called out quickly: "One moment, please, and I'll get the key!" dashed downstairs and up

again, breathlessly unlocked the door and threw it open.

Nobody was there!

He ran out into the street. On one side it terminated abruptly on the cliff on which his dwelling was perched. On the other, it descended more gradually into the next thoroughfare; but up and down the street, on either hand, no one was to be seen. A slightly superstitious feeling for an instant crept over him. Then he reflected that the mysterious visitor could in the interval of his getting the key have easily slipped down the steps of the cliff or entered the shrubbery of one of the adjacent houses. But why had she not waited? And what did she want? As he re-entered his door he mechanically raised his eyes to the windows of his neighbour's. This time he certainly was not mistaken. The two amused mischievous faces that suddenly disappeared behind the curtain as he looked up showed that the incident had not been unwitnessed. Yet it was impossible that it could have been either of *them*. Their house was only accessible by a long détour. It might have been the trick of a confederate; but the tone of half familiarity and half entreaty in the unseen visitor's voice dispelled the idea of any collusion. He entered the room and

closed the door angrily. A grim smile stole over his face as he glanced around at the dainty saint-like appointments of the absent Tappington, and thought what that irreproachable young man would have said to the indecorous intrusion, even though it had been a mistake. Would those shameless Pike County girls have dared to laugh at *him?*

But he was again puzzled to know why he himself should have been selected for this singular experience. Why was *he* considered fair game for these girls? And, for the matter of that, now that he reflected upon it, why had even this gentle, refined, and melancholy Cherry thought it necessary to talk slang to *him* on their first acquaintance, and offer to sing him the "Ham-fat Man"? It was true he had been a little gay; but never dissipated. Of course he was not a saint, like Tappington—oh, *that* was it! He believed he understood it now. He was suffering from that extravagant conception of what worldliness consists of, so common to very good people with no knowledge of the world. Compared to Tappington, he was in their eyes, of course, a rake and a roué. The explanation pleased him. He would not keep it to himself. He would gain Cherry's confidence and enlist her sympathies. Her gentle nature would revolt at this injustice to their

lonely lodger. She would see that there were degrees of goodness besides her brother's. She would perhaps sit on that stool again and *not* sing the "Ham-fat Man."

A day or two afterwards the opportunity seemed offered to him. As he was coming home and ascending the long hilly street, his eye was taken by a tall graceful figure just preceding him. It was she. He had never before seen her in the street, and was now struck with her ladylike bearing and the grave superiority of her perfectly simple attire. In a thoroughfare haunted by handsome women and striking toilettes, the refined grace of her mourning costume, and a certain stateliness that gave her the look of a young widow, was a contrast that evidently attracted others than himself. It was with an odd mingling of pride and jealousy that he watched the admiring yet respectful glances of the passers-by, some of whom turned to look again, and one or two to retrace their steps and follow her at a decorous distance. This caused him to quicken his own pace, with a new anxiety and a remorseful sense of wasted opportunity. What a booby he had been, not to have made more of his contiguity to this charming girl—to have been frightened at the naïve decorum of her maidenly instincts! He reached her side,

and raised his hat with a trepidation at her new-found graces—with a boldness that was defiant of her other admirers. She blushed slightly.

"I thought you'd overtake me before," she said naïvely. "*I* saw *you* ever so long ago."

He stammered, with an equal simplicity, that he had not dared to.

She looked a little frightened again, and then said hurriedly: "I only thought that I would meet you on Montgomery Street, and we would walk home together, I don't like to go out alone, and mother cannot always go with me. Tappington never cared to take me out—I don't know why. I think he didn't like the people staring and stopping us. But they stare more—don't you think?—when one is alone.

"So I thought if you were coming straight home, we might come together—unless you have something else to do?"

Herbert impulsively reiterated his joy at meeting her, and averred that no other engagement, either of business or pleasure, could or would stand in his way. Looking up, however, it was with some consternation that he saw they were already within a block of the house.

"Suppose we take a turn around the hill and come back by the old street down the steps?" he suggested earnestly.

The next moment he regretted it; the frightened look returned to her eyes; her face became melancholy and formal again.

"No!" she said quickly. "That would be taking a walk with you like these young girls and their young men on Saturdays. That's what Ellen does with the butcher's boy on Sundays, Tappington often used to meet them. Doing the 'Come, Philanders,' as he says you call it."

It struck Herbert that the didactic Tappington's method of inculcating a horror of slang in his sister's breast was open to some objection; but they were already on the steps of their house, and he was too much mortified at the reception of his last unhappy suggestion to make the confidential disclosure he had intended even if there had still been time.

"There's mother waiting for me," she said, after an awkward pause, pointing to the figure of Mrs. Brooks dimly outlined on the verandah. "I suppose she was beginning to be worried about my being out alone. She'll be so glad I met you." It didn't appear to Herbert, however, that Mrs. Brooks ex-

hibited any extravagant joy over the occurrence, and she almost instantly retired with her daughter into the sitting-room linking her arm in Cherry's, and, as it were empanoplying her with her own invulnerable shawl. Herbert went to his room more dissatisfied with himself than ever.

Two or three days elapsed without his seeing Cherry; even the well-known rustle of her skirt in the passage was missing. On the third evening he resolved to bear the formal terrors of the drawing-room again, and stumbled upon a decorous party consisting of Mrs. Brooks, the deacon, and the pastor's wife—but not Cherry. It struck him on entering that the momentary awkwardness of the company and the formal beginning of a new topic indicated that *he* had been the subject of their previous conversation. In this idea he continued, through that vague spirit of opposition which attacks impulsive people in such circumstances, to generally disagree with them on all subjects, and to exaggerate what he chose to believe they thought objectionable in him. He did not remain long; but learned in that brief interval that Cherry had gone to visit a friend in Contra Costa, and would be absent a fortnight; and he was conscious that the information was conveyed to him with a peculiar significance.

The result of which was only to intensify his interest in the absent Cherry, and for a week to plunge him in a sea of conflicting doubts and resolutions. At one time he thought seriously of demanding an explanation from Mrs. Brooks, and of confiding to her—as he had intended to do to Cherry—his fears that his character had been misinterpreted, and his reasons for believing so. But here he was met by the difficulty of formulating what he wished to have explained, and some doubts as to whether his confidences were prudent. At another time he contemplated a serious imitation of Tappington's perfections, a renunciation of the world, and an entire change in his habits. He would go regularly to church—*her* church, and take up Tappington's desolate Bible-class. But here the torturing doubt arose whether a young lady who betrayed a certain secular curiosity, and who had evidently depended upon her brother for a knowledge of the world, would entirely like it. At times he thought of giving up the room, and abandoning for ever this doubly dangerous proximity; but here again he was deterred by the difficulty of giving a satisfactory reason to his employer, who had procured it as a favour. His passion—for such he began to fear it to be—led him once to the extravagance of asking a

day's holiday from the bank, which he vaguely spent in the streets of Oakland in the hope of accidentally meeting the exiled Cherry.

III.

THE fortnight slowly passed. She returned, but he did not see her. She was always out or engaged in her room with some female friend when Herbert was at home. This was singular, as she had never appeared to him as a young girl who was fond of visiting or had ever affected female friendships. In fact, there was little doubt now that, wittingly or unwittingly, she was avoiding him.

He was moodily sitting by the fire one evening, having returned early from dinner. In reply to his habitual but affectedly careless inquiry, Ellen had told him that Mrs. Brooks was confined to her room by a slight headache, and that Miss Brooks was out. He was trying to read, and listening to the wind that occasionally rattled the casement and caused the solitary gas-lamp that was visible in the side street to flicker and leap wildly. Suddenly he heard the same footfall upon his outer step and a light tap at the door. Determined this time to solve the mystery, he sprang to his feet, and ran to the door;

but to his anger and astonishment it was locked and the key was gone. Yet he was positive that *he* had not taken it out.

The tap was timidly repeated. In desperation he called out: "Please don't go away yet. The key is gone; but I'll find it in a moment." Nevertheless he was at his wits' end.

There was a hesitating pause and then the sound of a key cautiously thrust into the lock. It turned; the door opened, and a tall figure, whose face and form were completely hidden in a veil and long gray shawl, quickly glided into the room and closed the door behind it. Then it suddenly raised its arms, the shawl was parted, the veil fell aside, and Cherry stood before him!

Her face was quite pale. Her eyes, usually downcast, frightened, or coldly clear, were bright and beautiful with excitement. The dimples were faintly there, although the smile was sad and half hysterical. She remained standing, erect and tall, her arms dropped at her side, holding the veil and shawl that still depended from her shoulders.

"So—I've caught you!" she said with a strange little laugh. "Oh yes. 'Please don't go away yet I'll get the key in a moment,'" she continued, mimicking his recent utterance.

He could only stammer, "Miss Brooks—then it was *you?*"

"Yes; and you thought it was *she,* didn't you? Well, and you're caught! I didn't believe it; I wouldn't believe it when they said it. I determined to find it out myself. And I have, and it's true."

Unable to determine whether she was serious or jesting, and conscious only of his delight at seeing her again, he advanced impulsively. But her expression instantly changed: she became at once stiff and school-girlishly formal, and stepped back towards the door.

"Don't come near me, or I'll go," she said quickly, with her hand upon the lock.

"But not before you tell me what you mean," he said half laughingly half earnestly. "Who is *she?* and what wouldn't you have believed? For upon my honour, Miss Brooks, I don't know what you are talking about."

His evident frankness and truthful manner appeared to puzzle her. "You mean to say you were expecting no one?" she said sharply.

"I assure you I was not."

"And—and no woman was ever here—at that door?"

He hesitated. "Not to-night—not for a long time; not since you returned from Oakland."

"Then there *was* one?"

"I believe so."

"You *believe*—you don't *know*?"

"I believed it was a woman from her voice: for the door was locked, and the key was downstairs. When I fetched it, and opened the door, she—or whoever it was—was gone."

"And that's why you said so imploringly, just now, 'Please don't go away yet?' You see I've caught you. Ah! I don't wonder you blush!"

If he had, his cheeks had caught fire from her brilliant eyes and the extravagantly affected sternness—as of a school-girl monitor—in her animated face. Certainly he had never seen such a transformation.

"Yes; but, you see, I wanted to know who the intruder was," he said, smiling at his own embarrassment.

"You did—well, perhaps *that* will tell you?"

It was found under your door before I went away." She suddenly produced from her pocket a folded paper, and handed it to him. It was a misspelt scrawl, and ran as follows:—

"Why are you so cruel? Why do you keep me dansing on the stepps before them gurls at the windows? Was it that stuck-up Saint, Miss Brooks, that you were afraid of, my deer? Oh, you faithless trater! Wait till I ketch you! I'll tear your eyes out and hern!"

It did not require great penetration for Herbert to be instantly convinced that the writer of this vulgar epistle and the owner of the unknown voice were two very different individuals. The note was evidently a trick. A suspicion of its perpetrators flashed upon him.

"Whoever the woman was, it was not she who wrote the note," he said positively. "Somebody must have seen her at the door. I remember now that those girls—your neighbours—were watching me from their window when I came out. Depend upon it, that letter comes from them."

Cherry's eyes opened widely with a sudden child-like perception, and then shyly dropped. "Yes," she said slowly; "they *did* watch you. They know it, for it was they who made it the talk of the neighbourhood, and that's how it came to mother's ears." She stopped, and, with a frightened look, stepped back towards the door again.

"Then *that* was why your mother——"

"Oh yes," interrupted Cherry quickly. "That was why I went over to Oakland, and why mother forbade my walking with you again, and why she had a talk with friends about your conduct, and why she came near telling Mr. Carstone all about it until I stopped her." She checked herself—he could hardly believe his eyes—the pale nun-like girl was absolutely blushing.

"I thank you, Miss Brooks," he said gravely, "for your thoughtfulness, although I hope I could have still proven my innocence to Mr. Carstone, even if some unknown woman tried my door by mistake, and was seen doing it. But I am pained to think that *you* could have believed me capable of so wanton and absurd an impropriety—and such a gross disrespect to your mother's house."

"But," said Cherry with child-like naïveté, "you know *you* don't think anything of such things, and that's what I told mother."

"You told your mother *that?*"

"Oh yes—I told her Tappington says it's quite common with young men. Please don't laugh—for it's very dreadful. Tappington didn't laugh when he told it to me as a warning. He was shocked."

"But, my dear Miss Brooks——"

"There—now you're angry—and that's as bad. Are you sure you didn't know that woman?"

"Positive!"

"Yet you seemed very anxious just now that she should wait till you opened the door."

"That was perfectly natural."

"I don't think it was natural at all."

"But—according to Tappington——"

"Because my brother is very good you need not make fun of him."

"I assure you I have no such intention. But what more can I say? I give you my word that I don't know who that unlucky woman was. No doubt she may have been some nearsighted neighbour who had mistaken the house, and I daresay was as thoroughly astonished at my voice as I was at hers. Can I say more? Is it necessary for me to swear that since I have been here no woman has ever entered that door—but——"

"But whom?"

"Yourself."

"I know what you mean," she said hurriedly, with her old frightened look, gliding to the outer door. "It's shameful what I've done. But I only did it because—because—I had faith in you, and didn't believe what they said was true." She had

already turned the lock. There were tears in her pretty eyes.

"Stop," said Herbert gently. He walked slowly towards her, and within reach of her frightened figure stopped with the timid respect of a mature and genuine passion. "You must not be seen going out of that door," he said gravely. "You must let me go first, and, when I am gone, lock the door again and go through the hall to your own room. No one must know that I was in the house when you came in at that door. Good-night."

Without offering his hand he lifted his eyes to her face. The dimples were all there—and something else. He bowed and passed out.

Ten minutes later he ostentatiously returned to the house by the front door, and proceeded up the stairs to his own room. As he cast a glance around he saw that the music-stool had been moved before the fire, evidently with the view of attracting his attention. Lying upon it, carefully folded, was the veil that she had worn. There could be no doubt that it was left there purposely. With a smile at this strange girl's last characteristic act of timid but compromising recklessness, after all his precautions, he raised it tenderly to his lips, and then hastened to hide it from the reach of vulgar eyes. But had

Cherry known that its temporary resting-place that night was under his pillow she might have doubted his superior caution.

When he returned from the bank the next afternoon, Cherry rapped ostentatiously at his door: "Mother wishes me to ask you," she began with a certain prim formality, which nevertheless did not preclude dimples, "if you would give us the pleasure of your company at our Church Festival to-night? There will be a concert and a collation. You could accompany us there if you cared. Our friends and Tappington's would be so glad to see you, and Dr. Stout would be delighted to make your acquaintance."

"Certainly!" said Herbert, delighted and yet astounded. "Then," he added in a lower voice, "your mother no longer believes me so dreadfully culpable?"

"Oh no," said Cherry in a hurried whisper, glancing up and down the passage, "I've been talking to her about it, and she is satisfied that it is all a jealous trick and slander of these neighbours. Why, I told her that they had even said that *I* was that mysterious woman; that I came that way to you because she had forbidden my seeing you openly."

"What! You dared say that?"

"Yes; don't you see? Suppose they said they *had* seen me coming in last night—*that* answers it," she said triumphantly.

"Oh, it does?" he said vacantly.

"Perfectly. So you see she's convinced that she ought to put you on the same footing as Tappington, before everybody; and then there won't be any trouble. You'll come, won't you? It won't be so *very* good. And then, I've told mother that as there have been so many street-fights, and so much talk about the Vigilance Committee lately, I ought to have somebody for an escort when I am coming home. And, if you're known, you see, as one of *us*, there'll be no harm in your meeting me."

"Thank you," he said, extending his hand gratefully.

Her fingers rested a moment in his. "Where did you put it?" she said demurely.

"It? Oh! *it's* all safe," he said quickly, but somewhat vaguely.

"But I don't call the upper drawer of your bureau safe," she returned poutingly, "where *everybody* can go. So you'll find it *now* inside the harmonium, on the keyboard."

"Oh, thank you."

"It's quite natural to have left it there *accidentally*—isn't it?" she said imploringly, assisted by all her dimples. Alas! she had forgotten that he was still holding her hand. Consequently, she had not time to snatch it away and vanish, with a stifled little cry, before it had been pressed two or three times to his lips. A little ashamed of his own boldness, Herbert remained for a few moments in the doorway listening, and looking uneasily down the dark passage. Presently a slight sound came over the fanlight of Cherry's room. Could he believe his ears? The saint-like Cherry—no doubt tutored, for example's sake, by the perfect Tappington—was softly whistling.

In this simple fashion the first pages of this little idyl were quietly turned. The book might have been closed or laid aside even then. But it so chanced that Cherry was an unconscious prophet; and presently it actually became a prudential necessity for her to have a masculine escort when she walked out. For a growing state of lawlessness and crime culminated one day in the deep tocsin of the Vigilance Committee, and at its stroke fifty thousand peaceful men, reverting to the first principles of social safety, sprang to arms, assembled at their quarters, or patrolled the streets. In another hour the

city of San Francisco was in the hands of a mob—the most peaceful, orderly, well organised, and temperate the world had ever known, and yet in conception as lawless, autocratic, and imperious as the conditions it opposed.

IV.

HERBERT, enrolled in the same section with his employer and one or two fellow-clerks, had participated in the meetings of the committee with the light-heartedness and irresponsibility of youth, regretting only the loss of his usual walk with Cherry and the hours that kept him from her house. He was returning from a protracted meeting one night when the number of arrests and searching for proscribed and suspected characters had been so large as to induce fears of organised resistance and rescue, and on reaching the foot of the hill found it already so late, that to avoid disturbing the family he resolved to enter his room directly by the door in the side street. On inserting his key in the lock it met with some resisting obstacle, which, however, yielded and apparently dropped on the mat inside. Opening the door and stepping into the perfectly dark apartment, he trod upon this object, which proved to be another key. The family must have procured it for their convenience during his absence, and after lock-

ing the door had carelessly left it in the lock. It was lucky that it had yielded so readily.

The fire had gone out. He closed the door and lit the gas, and after taking off his overcoat moved to the door leading into the passage to listen if anybody was still stirring. To his utter astonishment he found it locked. What was more remarkable—the key was also *inside!* An inexplicable feeling took possession of him. He glanced suddenly around the room, and then his eye fell upon the bed. Lying there, stretched at full length, was the recumbent figure of a man.

He was apparently in the profound sleep of utter exhaustion. The attitude of his limbs and the order of his dress—of which only his collar and cravat had been loosened—showed that sleep must have overtaken him almost instantly. In fact the bed was scarcely disturbed beyond the actual impress of his figure. He seemed to be a handsome matured man of about forty; his dark straight hair was a little thinned over the temples, although his long heavy moustache was still youthful and virgin. His clothes, which were elegantly cut and of finer material than that in ordinary use, the delicacy and neatness of his linen, the whiteness of his hands, and, more particularly, a certain dissipated pallor of complexion

and lines of recklessness on the brow and cheek, indicated to Herbert that the man before him was one of that desperate and suspected class—some of whose proscribed members he had been hunting—the professional gambler!

Possibly the magnetism of Herbert's intent and astonished gaze affected him. He moved slightly, half opened his eyes, said "Halloo, Tap," rubbed them again, wholly opened them, fixed them with a lazy stare on Herbert, and said—

"Now, who the devil are you?"

"I think *I* have the right to ask that question considering that this is my room," said Herbert sharply.

"*Your* room?"

"Yes!"

The stranger half raised himself on his elbow, glanced round the room, settled himself slowly back on the pillows with his hands clasped lightly behind his head, dropped his eyelids, smiled, and said—

"Rats!"

"What?" demanded Herbert, with a resentful sense of sacrilege to Cherry's virgin slang.

"Well, old rats then! D'ye think I don't know this shebang? Look here, Johnny, what are you

putting on all this side for, eh? What's your little game? Where's Tappington?"

"If you mean Mr. Brooks, the son of this house, who formerly lived in this room," replied Herbert, with a formal precision intended to show a doubt of the stranger's knowledge of Tappington, "you ought to know that he has left town."

"Left town!" echoed the stranger, raising himself again. "Oh, I see! getting rather too warm for him here? Humph! I ought to have thought of that. Well, you know he *did* take mighty big risks, anyway!" He was silent a moment, with his brows knit and a rather dangerous expression in his handsome face. "So some d——d hound gave him away—eh?"

"I hadn't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Brooks except by reputation, as the respected son of the lady upon whose house you have just intruded," said Herbert frigidly, yet with a creeping consciousness of some unpleasant revelation.

The stranger stared at him for a moment, again looked carefully round the room, and then suddenly dropped his head back on the pillow, and with his white hands over his eyes and mouth tried to restrain a spasm of silent laughter. After an

effort he succeeded, wiped his moist eyes, and sat up.

"So you didn't know Tappington, eh?" he said, lazily buttoning his collar.

"No."

"No more do I."

He retied his cravat, yawned, rose, shook himself perfectly neat again, and going to Herbert's dressing-table quietly took up a brush and began to lightly brush himself, occasionally turning to the window to glance out. Presently he turned to Herbert and said—

"Well, Johnny, what's your name?"

"I am Herbert Bly, of Carstone's Bank."

"So, a member of this same Vigilance Committee, I reckon," he continued.

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Bly, I owe you an apology for coming here, and some thanks for the only sleep I've had in forty-eight hours. I struck this old shebang at about ten o'clock, and it's now two, so I reckon I've put in about four hours' square sleep. Now, look here." He beckoned Herbert towards the window. "Do you see those three men standing under gaslight? Well, they're part of a gang of Vigilantes who've hunted me to the hill, and are waiting to see me

come out of the bushes, where they reckon I'm hiding. Go to them and say that I'm here. Tell them you've got Gentleman George—George Dornton, the man they've been hunting for a week—in this room. I promise you I won't stir, nor kick up a row, when they've come. Do it, and Carstone, if he's a square man, will raise your salary for it, and promote you." He yawned slightly, and then slowly looking around him, drew the easy-chair towards him and dropped comfortably in it, gazing at the astounded and motionless Herbert with a lazy smile.

"You're wondering what my little game is, Johnny, ain't you? Well, I'll tell you. What with being hunted from pillar to post, putting my old pards to no end of trouble, and then slipping up on it whenever I think I've got a sure thing like this"—he cast an almost affectionate glance at the bed—"I've come to the conclusion that it's played out, and I might as well hand in my checks. It's only a question of my being *run out* of 'Frisco, or hiding until I can *slip out* myself; and I've reckoned I might as well give them the trouble and expense of transportation. And if I can put a good thing in your way in doing it—why, it will sort of make things square with you for the fuss I've given you."

Even in the stupefaction and helplessness of

knowing that the man before him was the notorious duellist and gambler George Dornton, one of the first marked for deportation by the Vigilance Committee, Herbert recognised all he had heard of his invincible coolness, courage, and almost philosophic fatalism. For an instant his youthful imagination checked even his indignation. When he recovered himself, he said with rising colour and boyish vehemence—

"Whoever *you* may be, I am neither a police officer nor a spy. You have no right to insult me by supposing that I would profit by the mistake that made you my guest, or that I would refuse you the sanctuary of the roof that covers your insult as well as your blunder."

The stranger gazed at him with an amused expression, and then rose and stretched out his hand.

"Shake, Mr. Bly! You're the only man that ever kicked George Dornton when he deserved it. Good-night!" He took his hat and walked to the door.

"Stop!" said Herbert impulsively; "the night is already far gone; go back and finish your sleep."

"You mean it?"

"I do."

The stranger turned, walked back to the bed, unfastening his coat and collar as he did so, and laid himself down in the attitude of a moment before.

"I will call you in the morning," continued Herbert. "By that time"—he hesitated—"by that time—your pursuers may have given up their search. One word more. You will be frank with me?"

"Go on."

"Tappington and you are—friends?"

"Well—yes."

"His mother and sister know nothing of this?"

"I reckon he didn't boast of it. *I* didn't. Is that all?" sleepily.

"Yes."

"Don't *you* worry about *him*. Good-night."

"Good-night."

But even at that moment Geoge Dornton had dropped off in a quiet peaceful sleep.

Bly turned down the light, and, drawing his easy-chair to the window, dropped into it in bewildering reflection. This then was the secret—unknown to mother and daughter—unsuspected by all! This was the double life of Tappington, half revealed in his flirtation with the neighbours, in the hidden cards behind the books, in the mysterious visitor—still unaccounted for—and now wholly exploded by this sleeping confederate, for whom, somehow, Herbert felt the greatest sympathy! What was to be done? What should he say to Cherry—to her

mother—to Mr. Carstone? Yet he had felt he had done right. From time to time he turned to the motionless recumbent shadow on the bed and listened to its slow and peaceful respiration. Apart from that undefinable attraction which all original natures have for each other, the thrice-blessed mystery of protection of the helpless, for the first time in his life, seemed to dawn upon him through that night.

Nevertheless, the actual dawn came slowly. Twice he nodded and awoke quickly with a start. The third time it was day. The street-lamps were extinguished, and with them the moving restless watchers seemed also to have vanished. Suddenly a formal deliberate rapping at the door leading to the hall startled him to his feet.

It must be Ellen. So much the better; he could quickly get rid of her. He glanced at the bed; Dornton slept on undisturbed. He unlocked the door cautiously, and instinctively fell back before the erect, shawled, and decorous figure of Mrs. Brooks. But an utterly new resolution and excitement had supplanted the habitual resignation of her handsome features, and given them an angry sparkle of expression.

Recollecting himself, he instantly stepped forward into the passage, drawing to the door behind him,

as she, with equal celerity, opposed it with her hand.

"Mr. Bly," she said deliberately, "Ellen has just told me that your voice has been heard in conversation with some one in this room late last night. Up to this moment I have foolishly allowed my daughter to persuade me that certain infamous scandals regarding your conduct here were false. I must ask you as a gentleman to let me pass now and satisfy myself."

"But, my dear madam, one moment. Let me first explain—I beg——" stammered Herbert with a half-hysterical laugh. "I assure you a gentleman friend——"

But she had pushed him aside and entered precipitately. With a quick feminine glance round the room, she turned to the bed, and then halted in overwhelming confusion.

"It's a friend," said Herbert in a hasty whisper. "A friend of mine who returned with me late, and whom, on account of the disturbed state of the streets, I induced to stay here all night. He was so tired that I have not had the heart to disturb him yet."

"Oh, pray don't!—I beg——" said Mrs. Brooks with a certain youthful vivacity, but still gazing at

the stranger's handsome features as she slowly retreated "Not for worlds!"

Herbert was relieved; she was actually blushing.

"You see, it was quite unpremeditated, I assure you. We came in together," whispered Herbert, leading her to the door, "and I——"

"Don't believe a word of it, madam," said a lazy voice from the bed, as the stranger leisurely raised himself upright, putting the last finishing touch to his cravat as he shook himself neat again. "I'm an utter stranger to him, and he knows it. He found me here, hiding from the Vigilantes, who were chasing me on the hill. I got in at that door, which happened to be unlocked. He let me stay because he was a gentleman—and—I—wasn't. I beg your pardon, madam, for having interrupted him before you; but it was a little rough to have him lie on *my* account when he wasn't the kind of man to lie on his *own*. You'll forgive him—won't you, please?—and, as I'm taking myself off now, perhaps you'll overlook *my* intrusion too."

It was impossible to convey the lazy frankness of this speech, the charming smile with which it was accompanied, or the easy yet deferential manner with which, taking up his hat, he bowed to Mrs. Brooks as he advanced towards the door.

"But," said Mrs. Brooks, hurriedly glancing from Herbert to the stranger, "it must be the Vigilantes who are now hanging about the street. Ellen saw them from her window, and thought they were *your* friends, Mr. Bly. This gentleman—your friend"—she had become a little confused in her novel excitement—"really ought not to go out now. It would be madness."

"If you wouldn't mind his remaining a little longer, it certainly would be safer," said Herbert with wondering gratitude.

"I certainly shouldn't consent to his leaving my house now," said Mrs. Brooks with dignity; "and if you wouldn't mind calling Cherry here, Mr. Bly—she's in the dining-room—and then showing yourself for a moment in the street and finding out what they wanted, it would be the best thing to do."

Herbert flew downstairs; in a few hurried words he gave the same explanation to the astounded Cherry that he had given to her mother, with the mischievous addition that Mrs. Brooks's unjust suspicions had precipitated her into becoming an amicable accomplice, and then ran out into the street. Here he ascertained from one of the Vigilantes whom he knew, that they were really seeking Dornton; but that, concluding that the fugitive had already

escaped to the wharves, they expected to withdraw their surveillance at noon. Somewhat relieved, he hastened back, to find the stranger calmly seated on the sofa in the parlour with the same air of frank indifference, lazily relating the incidents of his flight to the two women, who were listening with every expression of sympathy and interest. "Poor fellow!" said Cherry, taking the astonished Bly aside into the hall, "I don't believe he's half as bad as *they* said he is—or as even *he* makes himself out to be. But *did* you notice mother?"

Herbert, a little dazed, and, it must be confessed, a trifle uneasy at this ready acceptance of the stranger, abstractedly said he had not.

"Why, it's the most ridiculous thing. She's actually going round *without her shawl,* and does'nt seem to know it."

V.

WHEN Herbert finally reached the bank that morning he was still in a state of doubt and perplexity. He had parted with his grateful visitor, whose safety in a few hours seemed assured, but without the least further revelation or actual allusion to anything antecedent to his selecting Tappington's room as refuge. More than that, Herbert was convinced from his manner that he had no intention of making a confidant of Mrs. Brooks, and this convinced him that Dornton's previous relations with Tappington were not only utterly inconsistent with that young man's decorous reputation, but were unexpected by the family. The stranger's familiar knowledge of the room, his mysterious allusions to the "risks" Tappington had taken and his sudden silence on the discovery of Bly's ignorance of the whole affair—all pointed to some secret that, innocent or not, was more or less perilous, not only to the son but to the mother and sister. Of the latter's ignorance he had no doubt—but had he any right

to enlighten them? Admitting that Tappington had deceived them with the others, would they thank him for opening their eyes to it? If they had already a suspicion, would they care to know that it was shared by him? Halting between his frankness and his delicacy, the final thought that in his budding relations with the daughter it might seem a cruel bid for her confidence, or a revenge for their distrust of him, inclined him to silence. But an unforeseen occurrence took the matter from his hands. At noon he was told that Mr. Carstone wished to see him in his private room!

Satisfied that his complicity with Dornton's escape was discovered, the unfortunate Herbert presented himself, pale but self-possessed, before his employer. That brief man of business bade him be seated, and standing himself before the fireplace, looked down curiously, but not unkindly, upon his employé.

"Mr. Bly, the bank does not usually interfere with the private affairs of its employés, but for certain reasons which I prefer to explain to you later, I must ask you to give me a straightforward answer to one or two questions. I may say that they have nothing to do with your relations to the bank, which are to us perfectly satisfactory."

More than ever convinced that Mr. Carstone was

about to speak about his visitor, Herbert signified his willingness to reply.

"You have been seen a great deal with Miss Brooks lately—on the street and elsewhere—acting as her escort, and evidently on terms of intimacy. To do you both justice, neither of you seemed to have made it a secret or avoided observation; but I must ask you directly if it is with her mother's permission?"

Considerably relieved, but wondering what was coming, Herbert answered, with boyish frankness, that it was.

"Are you—engaged to the young lady?"

"No, sir."

"Are you—well, Mr. Bly—briefly, are you what is called 'in love' with her?" asked the banker, with a certain brusque hurrying over of a sentiment evidently incompatible with their present business surroundings.

Herbert blushed. It was the first time he had heard the question voiced, even by himself.

"I am," he said resolutely.

"And you wish to marry her?"

"If I dared ask her to accept a young man with no position as yet," stammered Herbert.

"People don't usually consider a young man in

Carstone's Bank of no position," said the banker drily; "and I wish for your sake *that* were the only impediment. For I am compelled to reveal to you a secret." He paused, and folding his arms, looked fixedly down upon his clerk. "Mr. Bly, Tappington Brooks, the brother of your sweetheart, was a defaulter and embezzler from this bank!"

Herbert sat dumbfounded and motionless.

"Understand two things," continued Mr. Carstone quickly. "First, that no purer or better women exist than Miss Brooks and her mother. Secondly, that they know nothing of this, and that only myself and one other man are in possession of the secret."

He slightly changed his position, and went on more deliberately. "Six weeks ago Tappington sat in that chair where you are sitting now, a convicted hypocrite and thief. Luckily for him, although his guilt was plain, and the whole secret of his double life revealed to me, a sum of money advanced in pity by one of his gambling confederates had made his accounts good and saved him from suspicion in the eyes of his fellow-clerks and my partners. At first he tried to fight me on that point; then he blustered and said his mother could have refunded the money; and asked me what was a paltry five thousand dollars! I told him, Mr. Bly, that it might

be five years of his youth in State prison; that it might be five years of sorrow and shame for his mother and sister; that it might be an everlasting stain on the name of his dead father—my friend. He talked of killing himself: I told him he was a cowardly fool. He asked me to give him up to the authorities: I told him I intended to take the law in my own hands and give him another chance; and then he broke down. I transferred him that very day, without giving him time to communicate with anybody, to our branch office at Portland, with a letter explaining his position to our agent, and the strict injunction that for six months he should be under strict surveillance. I myself undertook to explain his sudden departure to Mrs. Brooks, and obliged him to write to her from time to time." He paused, and then continued. "So far I believe my plan has been successful: the secret has been kept; he has broken with the evil associates that ruined him here—to the best of my knowledge he has had no communication with them since; even a certain woman here who shared his vicious hidden life has abandoned him."

"Are you sure?" asked Herbert involuntarily, as he recalled his mysterious visitor.

"I believe the Vigilance Committee has con-

sidered it a public duty to deport her and her confederates beyond the State," returned Carstone drily.

Another idea flashed upon Herbert. "And the gambler who advanced the money to save Tappington?" he said breathlessly.

"Wasn't such a hound as the rest of his kind, if report says true," answered Carstone. "He was well known here as George Dornton—Gentleman George—a man capable of better things. But he was before your time, Mr. Bly—*you* don't know him."

Herbert didn't deem it a felicitous moment to correct his employer, and Mr. Carstone continued, "I have now told you what I thought it was my duty to tell you. I must leave *you* to judge how far it affects your relations with Miss Brooks."

Herbert did not hesitate. "I should be very sorry, sir, to seem to undervalue your consideration or disregard your warning; but I am afraid that even if you had been less merciful to Tappington, and he were now a convicted felon, I should change neither my feelings nor my intentions to his sister."

"And you would still marry her?" said Carstone sternly; "*you*, an employé of the bank, would set the example of allying yourself with one who had robbed it?"

"I—am afraid I would, sir," said Herbert slowly.

"Even if it were a question of your remaining here?" said Carstone grimly.

Poor Herbert already saw himself dismissed, and again taking up his weary quest for employment; but, nevertheless, he answered stoutly—

"Yes, sir."

"And nothing will prevent you marrying Miss Brooks?"

"Nothing—save my inability to support her."

"Then," said Mr. Carstone, with a peculiar light in his eyes, "it only remains for the bank to mark its opinion of your conduct by *increasing your salary to enable you to do so!* Shake hands, Mr. Bly," he said, laughing. "I think you'll do to tie to—and I believe the young lady will be of the same opinion. But not a word to either her or her mother in regard to what you have heard. And now I may tell you something more. I am not without hope of Tappington's future, nor—d———n it—without some excuse for his fault, sir. He was artificially brought up. When my old friend died, Mrs. Brooks, still a handsome woman like all her sex, wouldn't rest until she had another devotion, and wrapped herself and her children up in the Church. Theology may be all right for grown people, but it's apt to make

children artificial; and Tappington was pious before he was fairly good. He drew on a religious credit before he had a moral capital behind it. He was brought up with no knowledge of the world, and when he went into it—it captured him. I don't say there are not saints born into the world occasionally; but for every one, you'll find a lot of promiscuous human nature. My old friend, Josh Brooks, had a heap of it, and it wouldn't be strange if some was left in his children, and burst through their strait-lacing in a queer way. That's all! Good-morning, Mr. Bly. Forget what I've told you for six months, and then I shouldn't wonder if Tappington was on hand to give his sister away."

. . . . .

Mr. Carstone's prophecy was but half realised. At the end of six months Herbert Bly's discretion and devotion were duly rewarded by Cherry's hand. But Tappington did *not* give her away. That saintly prodigal passed his period of probation with exemplary rectitude, but, either from a dread of old temptation, or some unexplained reason, he preferred to remain at Portland, and his fastidious nest on Telegraph Hill knew him no more. The key of the little door on the side street passed, naturally, into the keeping of Mrs. Bly.

Whether the secret of Tappington's double life was ever revealed to the two women is not known to the chronicler. Mrs. Bly is reported to have said that the climate of Oregon was more suited to her brother's delicate constitution than the damp fogs of San Francisco, and that his tastes were always opposed to the mere frivolity of metropolitan society. The only possible reason for supposing that the mother may have become cognisant of her son's youthful errors was in the occasional visits to the house of the handsome George Dornton, who, in the social revolution that followed the brief reign of the Vigilance Committee, characteristically returned as a dashing stockbroker, and the fact that Mrs. Brooks seemed to have discarded her ascetic shawl for ever. But as all this was contemporaneous with the absurd rumour that owing to the loneliness induced by the marriage of her daughter she contemplated a similar change in her own condition, it is deemed unworthy the serious consideration of this veracious chronicle.

A MECÆNAS OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE.

A MECÆNAS OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE.

CHAPTER I.

As Mr. Robert Rushbrook, known to an imaginative press as the "Mecænas of the Pacific Slope," drove up to his country seat, equally referred to as a "palatial villa," he cast a quick but practical look at the pillared pretensions of that enormous shell of wood and paint and plaster. The statement, also a reportorial one, that its site, the Cañon of Los Osos, "some three years ago was disturbed only by the passing tread of bear and wild cat," had lost some of its freshness as a picturesque apology, and already successive improvements on the original building seemingly cast the older part of the structure back to a hoary antiquity. To many it stood as a symbol of everything Robert Rushbrook did or had done—an improvement of all previous performances; it was like his own life—an exciting

though irritating state of transition to something better. Yet the visible architectural result, as here shown, was scarcely harmonious; indeed, some of his friends—and Mecænas had many—professed to classify the various improvements by the successive fortunate ventures in their owner's financial career, which had led to new additions, under the names of "The Comstock Lode Period," "The Union Pacific Renaissance," "The Great Wheat Corner," and "Water Front Gable Style," a humorous trifling that did not, however, prevent a few who were artists from accepting Mecænas' liberal compensation for their services in giving shape to those ideas.

Relinquishing to a groom his fast-trotting team, the second relay in his two hours' drive from San Francisco, he leaped to the ground to meet the architect, already awaiting his orders in the court-yard. With his eyes still fixed upon the irregular building before him, he mingled his greeting and his directions.

"Look here, Barker, we'll have a wing thrown out here, and a hundred-foot ball-room. Something to hold a crowd; something that can be used for music —*sabe?*—a concert, or a show."

"Have you thought of any style, Mr. Rushbrook?" suggested the architect.

"No," said Rushbrook; "I've been thinking of the time—thirty days, and everything to be in. You'll stop to dinner. I'll have you sit near Jack Somers. You can talk style to him. Say I told you."

"You wish it completed in thirty days?" repeated the architect, dubiously.

"Well, I shouldn't mind if it were less. You can begin at once. There's a telegraph in the house. Patrick will take any message, and you can send up to San Francisco and fix things before dinner."

Before the man could reply Rushbrook was already giving a hurried interview to the gardener and others on his way to the front porch. In another moment he had entered his own hall—a wonderful temple of white and silver plaster, formal, yet friable like the sugared erection of a wedding cake—where his major-domo awaited him.

"Well, who's here?" asked Rushbrook, still advancing towards his apartments.

"Dinner is set for thirty, sir," said the functionary, keeping step demurely with his master, "but Mr. Appleby takes ten over to San Mateo, and some may sleep there. The *char-à-banc* is still out and five saddles-horses, to a picnic in Green Cañon, and I can't positively say, but I should think you might

count on seeing about forty-five guests before you go to town to-morrow. The opera troupe seem to have not exactly understood the invitation, sir."

"How? I gave it myself."

"The chorus and supernumeraries thought themselves invited too, sir, and have come, I believe, sir. At least Signora Pegrelli and Madame Denise said so, and that they would speak to you about it, but that meantime I could put them up anywhere."

"And you made no distinction, of course?"

"No, sir, I put them in the corresponding rooms opposite, sir. I don't think the prima donnas like it."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir."

Whatever was in their minds, the two men never changed their steady, practical gravity of manner. The major-domo's appeared to be a subdued imitation of his master's, worn, as he might have worn his master's clothes, had he accepted, or Mr. Rushbrook permitted such a degradation. By this time they had reached the door of Mr. Rushbrook's room, and the man paused. "I didn't include some guests of Mr. Leyton's, sir, that he brought over here to show around the place, but he told me to tell you he would take them away again, or leave them, as

you liked. They're some Eastern strangers stopping with him."

"All right," said Rushbrook quietly, as he entered his own apartment. It was decorated as garishly as the hall, as staring and vivid in colour, but wholesomely new and clean for all its paint, veneering and plaster. It was filled with heterogeneous splendour—all new and well kept, yet with so much of the attitude of the show-room still lingering about it that one almost expected to see the various articles of furniture ticketed with their prices. A luxurious bed, with satin hangings and Indian carved posts, standing ostentatiously in a corner, kept up this resemblance, for in a curtained recess stood a worn camp bedstead, Rushbrook's real couch, Spartan in its simplicity.

Mr. Rushbrook drew his watch from his pocket, deliberately divested himself of his boots, coat, waistcoat and cravat. Then rolling himself in a fleecy, blanket-like rug with something of the habitual dexterity of a frontiersman, he threw himself on his couch, closed his eyes and went instantly to sleep. Lying there, he appeared to be a man comfortably middle-aged with thick iron-grey hair that might have curled had he encouraged such indirection; a skin roughened and darkened by external hardships

and exposure, but free from taint of inner vice or excess, and indistinctive features redeemed by a singularly handsome mouth. As the lower part of the face was partly hidden by a dense but closely-cropped beard, it is probable that the delicate outlines of his lips had gained something from their framing.

He slept, through what seemed to be the unnatural stillness of the large house—a quiet that might have come from the lingering influence of the still virgin solitude around it, as if Nature had forgotten the intrusion or were stealthily retaking her own; and later, through the rattle of returning wheels or the sound of voices, which were, however, promptly absorbed in that deep and masterful silence which was the unabdicating genius of the Cañon. For it was remarkable that even the various artists, musicians, orators and poets whom Mecænas had gathered in his cool business fashion under that roof, all seemed to become, by contrast with surrounding Nature, as new and artificial as the house, and as powerless to assert themselves against its influence.

He was still sleeping when James re-entered the room, but awoke promptly at the sound of his voice. In a few moments he had re-arranged his scarcely disordered toilette, and stepped out refreshed and

observant into the hall. The guests were still absent from that part of the building, and he walked leisurely past the carelessly opened doors of the rooms they had left. Everywhere he met the same glaring ornamentation and colour, the same garishness of treatment, the same inharmonious extravagance of furniture, and everywhere the same troubled acceptance of it by the inmates, or the same sense of temporary and restricted tenancy. Dresses were hung over cheval glasses; clothes piled up on chairs to avoid the use of doubtful and too ornamented wardrobes, and in some cases more practical guests had apparently encamped in a corner of their apartment. A gentleman from Siskyou—sole proprietor of a mill patent now being considered by Mecænas—had confined himself to a rocking-chair and clothes horse as being trustworthy and familiar; a bolder spirit from Yreka—in treaty for capital to start an independent journal devoted to Mecænas' interests—had got a good deal out of, and indeed all he had *into,* a Louis XVI. *Armoire;* while a young painter from Sacramento had simply retired into his adjoining bathroom, leaving the glories of his bedroom untarnished. Suddenly he paused.

He had turned into a smaller passage in order

to make a shorter cut through one of the deserted suites of apartments that should bring him to that part of the building where he designed to make his projected improvement, when his feet were arrested on the threshold of a sitting-room. Although it contained the same decoration and furniture as the other rooms, it looked totally different! It was tasteful, luxurious, comfortable and habitable. The furniture seemed to have fallen into harmonious position; even the staring decorations of the walls and ceiling were toned down by sprays of laurel and red-stained *manzanito* boughs with their berries, apparently fresh plucked from the near cañon. But he was more unexpectedly impressed to see that the room was at that moment occupied by a tall handsome girl, who had paused to take breath, with her hand still on the heavy centre table she was moving. Standing there, graceful, glowing and animated, she looked the living genius of the recreated apartment.

CHAPTER II.

MR. RUSHBROOK glanced rapidly at his unknown guest. "Excuse me," he said, with respectful business brevity, "but I thought every one was out," and he stepped backward quickly.

"I've only just come," she said without embarrassment, "and would you mind as you *are* here, giving me a lift with this table?"

"Certainly," replied Rushbrook, and under the young girl's direction the millionaire moved the table to one side.

During the operation he was trying to determine which of his unrecognised guests the fair occupant was. Possibly one of the Leyton party, that James had spoken of as impending.

"Then you have changed all the furniture, and put up these things?" he asked, pointing to the laurel.

"Yes, the room was really something *too* awful. It looks better now, don't you think?"

"A hundred per cent.," said Rushbrook, promptly,

"Look here, I'll tell you what you've done. You've set the furniture *to work!* It was simply lying still—with no return to anybody on the investment."

The young girl opened her grey eyes at this, and then smiled. The intruder seemed to be characteristic of California. As for Rushbrook, he regretted that he did not know her better, he would at once have asked her to re-arrange all the rooms and have managed in some way to liberally reward her for it. A girl like that had no nonsense about her.

"Yes," she said, "I wonder Mr. Rushbrook don't look at it in that way. It is a shame that all these pretty things—and you know they really are good and valuable—shouldn't show what they are. But I suppose everybody here accepts the fact that this man simply buys them beause they are valuable, and nobody interferes, and is content to humour him, laugh at him and feel superior. It don't strike me as being quite fair, does it you?"

Rushbrook was pleased. Without the vanity that would be either annoyed at this revelation of his reputation, or gratified at her defence of it, he was simply glad to discover that she had not recognised him as her host, and could continue the conversa-

tion unreservedly. "Have you seen the ladies' boudoir?" he asked. "You know, the room fitted with knick-knacks and pretty things—some of 'em bought from old collections in Europe, by fellows who knew what they were—but perhaps—" he added, looking into her eyes for the first time—"didn't know exactly what ladies care for."

"I merely glanced in there when I first came, for there was such a queer lot of women—I'm told he isn't very particular in that way—that I didn't stay."

"And you didn't think *they* might be just as valuable and good as some of the furniture, if they could have been pulled and put into shape, or set in a corner, eh?"

The young girl smiled; she thought her fellow-guest rather amusing, none the less so perhaps for catching up her own ideas, but nevertheless she slightly shrugged her shoulders with that hopeless scepticism which women reserve for their own sex. "Some of them looked as if they had been pulled around, as you say, and hadn't been improved by it."

"There's no one there now," said Rushbrook, with practical directness, "come and take a look at it." She complied without hesitation, walking by

his side, tall, easy, and self-possessed, apparently accepting without self-consciousness his half paternal, half comrade-like informality. The boudoir was a large room, repeating on a bigger scale the incongruousness and ill-fitting splendour of the others. When she had of her own accord recognised and pointed out the more admirable articles, he said, gravely looking at his watch, "We've just about seven minutes yet; if you'd like to pull and haul these things around I'll help you."

The young girl smiled. "I'm quite content with what I've done in my own room, where I have no one's taste to consult but my own. I hardly know how Mr. Rushbrook, or his lady friends, might like my operating here." Then recognising with feminine tact the snub that might seem implied in her refusal, she said quickly, "Tell me something about our host—but first, look! isn't that pretty?"

She had stopped before the window that looked upon the dim blue abyss of the cañon, and was leaning out to gaze upon it. Rushbrook joined her.

"There isn't much to be changed down *there,* is there?" he said, half interrogatively.

"No, not unless Mr. Rushbrook took it into his head to roof it in, and somebody was ready with a

contract to do it. But what do you know of him? Remember, I'm quite a stranger here."

"You came with Charley Leyton?"

"With *Mrs.* Leyton's party," said the young girl, with a half-smiling emphasis. "But it seems that we don't know whether Mr. Rushbrook wants us here or not, till he comes. And the drollest thing about it is that they're all so perfectly frank about saying so."

"Charley and he are old friends, and you'll do to trust to their judgment."

This was hardly the kind of response that the handsome and clever society girl before him had been in the habit of receiving, but it amused her. Her fellow-guest was decidedly original. But he hadn't told her about Rushbrook, and it struck her that his opinion would be independent at least. She reminded him of it.

"Look here," said Rushbrook, "you'll meet a man here to-night—or he'll be sure to meet *you*—who'll tell you all about Rushbrook. He's a smart chap, knows everybody and talks well. His name is Jack Somers; he is a great ladies' man. He can talk to you about these sort of things, too," indicating the furniture with a half tolerant, half contemptuous

gesture, that struck her as inconsistent with what seemed to be his previous interest—"just as well as he can talk of people. Been in Europe too."

The young girl's eye brightened with a quick vivacity at the name, but a moment after became reflective and slightly embarrassed. "I know him—I met him at Mr. Leyton's—he has already talked of Mr. Rushbrook, but—" she added, avoiding any conclusion, with a pretty pout, "I'd like to have the opinion of others. Yours, now, I fancy would be quite independent."

"You stick to what Jack Somers has said, good or bad, and you won't be far wrong," he said assuringly. He stopped, his quick ear had heard approaching voices; he returned to her and held out his hand. As it seemed to her that in California everybody shook hands with everybody else on the slightest occasions, sometimes to save further conversation, she gave him her own. He shook it, less forcibly than she had feared, and abruptly left her. For a moment she was piqued at this superior and somewhat brusque way of ignoring her request, but reflecting that it might be the awkwardness of an untrained man she dismissed it from her mind. The voices of her friends in the already resounding passages also recalled her to the fact that she had

been wandering about the house with a stranger, and she rejoined them a little self-consciously.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Leyton, gaily, "it seems we are to stay. Leyton says Rushbrook won't hear of our going."

"Does that mean that your husband takes the whole opera troupe over to your house in exchange?"

"Don't be satirical, but congratulate yourself on your opportunity of seeing an awfully funny gathering. I wouldn't have you miss it for the world. It's the most characteristic thing out."

"Characteristic of what?"

"Of Rushbrook, of course. Nobody else would conceive of getting together such a lot of queer people."

"But don't it strike you that we're a part of the lot?"

"Perhaps," returned the lively Mrs. Leyton. "No doubt that's the reason why Jack Somers is coming over, and is so anxious that *you* should stay. I can't imagine why else he should rave about Miss Grace Nevil as he does. Come Grace, no New York or Philadelphia airs here! Consider your uncle's interests with this capitalist, to say nothing of ours. Because you're a millionaire and have been accustomed to riches from your birth, don't turn up your nose at

our unpampered appetites. Besides, Jack Somers is Rushbrook's particular friend, and he may think your criticisms unkind."

"But *is* Mr. Somers such a great friend of Mr. Rushbrook's?" asked Grace Nevil.

"Why, of course. Rushbrook consults him about all these things; gives him *carte blanche* to invite whom he likes and order what he likes, and trusts his taste and judgment implicitly."

"Then this gathering is Mr. Somers' selection?"

"How preposterous you are, Grace. Of course not. Only Somers' idea of what is pleasing to Rushbrook, gotten up with a taste and discretion all his own. You know Somers is a gentleman, educated at West Point, travelled all over Europe—you might have met him there,—and Rushbrook, well, you have only to see him to know what *he* is. Don't you understand?"

A slight seriousness, the same shadow that once before darkened the girl's charming face, gave way to a mischievous knitting of her brows as she said naively, "No."

CHAPTER III.

GRACE NEVIL had quite recovered her equanimity when the indispensable Mr. Somers, handsome, well-bred and self-restrained, approached her later in the crowded drawing-room. Blended with his subdued personal admiration was a certain ostentation of respect—as of a tribute to a distinguished guest—that struck her. "I am to have the pleasure of taking you in, Miss Nevil," he said. "It's my one compensation for the dreadful responsibility just thrust upon me. Our host has been suddenly called away, and I am left to take his place."

Miss Nevil was slightly startled. Nevertheless, she smiled graciously. "From what I hear this is no new function of yours; that is, if there really *is* a Mr. Rushbrook. I am inclined to think him a myth."

"You make me wish he were," retorted Somers gallantly, "but as I couldn't reign at all, except in his stead, I shall look to you to lend your rightful grace to my borrowed dignity."

The more general announcement to the company was received with a few perfidious regrets from the more polite, but with only amused surprise by the majority. Indeed, many considered it "characteristic" —"so like Bob Rushbrook," and a few enthusiastic friends looked upon it as a crowning and intentional stroke of humour. It remained, however, for the gentleman from Siskyou to give the incident a subtlety that struck Miss Nevil's fancy. "It reminds me," he said in her hearing, "of ole Kernel Frisbee, of Robertson County, one of the purlitest men I ever struck. When he knew a feller was very dry, he'd jest set the decanter afore him, and manage to be called outer the room on bus'ness. Now, Bob Rushbrook's about as white a man as that. He's jest the feller, who, knowing you and me might feel kinder restrained about indulgin' our appetites afore him, kinder drops out easy, and leaves us alone." And she was impressed by an instinct that the speaker really felt the delicacy he spoke of, and that it left no sense of inferiority behind.

The dinner, served in a large, brilliantly-lit saloon, that in floral decoration and gilded columns suggested an ingenious blending of a steamboat, *table d'hôte,* and "harvest home," was perfect in its *cuisine,* even if somewhat extravagant in its proportions.

"I should be glad to receive the salary that Rushbrook pays his *chef,* and still happier to know how to earn it as fairly," said Somers to his fair companion.

"But is his skill entirely appreciated here," she asked.

"Perfectly," responded Somers. "Our friend from Siskyou over there, appreciates that *pâté* which he cannot name, as well as I do. Rushbrook himself is the only exception, yet I fancy that even *his* simplicity and regularity in feeding is as much a matter of business with him as any defect in his earlier education. In his eyes, his *chef's* greatest qualification is his promptness and fertility. Have you noticed that ornament before you?" pointing to an elaborate confection. "It bears your initials, you see. It was conceived and executed since you arrived—rather, I should say, since it was known that you would honour us with your company. The greatest difficulty encountered was to find out what your initials were."

"And I suppose," mischievously added the young girl to her acknowledgments, "that the same fertile mind which conceived the design eventually provided the initials?"

"That is our secret," responded Somers, with affected gravity.

The wines were of characteristic expensiveness and provoked the same general comment. Rushbrook seldom drank wine; Somers had selected it. But the barbaric opulence of the entertainment culminated in the Californian fruits, piled in pyramids on silver dishes, gorgeous and unreal in their size and painted beauty, and the two Divas smiled over a basket of grapes and peaches as outrageous in dimensions and glaring colour as any pasteboard banquet at which they had professionally assisted. As the courses succeeded each other, under the exaltation of wine, conversation became more general as regarded participation, but more local and private as regarded the subject, until Miss Nevil could no longer follow it. The interests of that one, the hopes of another, the claims of a third, in affairs that were otherwise uninteresting, were all discussed with singular youthfulness of trust that, alone to her, seemed remarkable. Not that she lacked entertainment from the conversation of her clever companion, whose confidences and criticisms were very pleasant to her; but she had a gentlewoman's instinct that he talked to her too much, and more than was consistent with his duties as the general host. She

looked around the table for her singular acquaintance of an hour before, but she had not seen him since. She would have spoken about him to Somers, but she had an instinctive idea that the latter would be antipathetic, in spite of the stranger's flattering commendation. So she found herself again following Somers' cynical but good-humoured description of the various guests—and I fear, seeing with his eyes, listening with his ears, and occasionally participating in his superior attitude. The "fearful joy" she had found in the novelty of the situation, and the originality of the actors, seemed now quite right from this critical point of view. So she learned how the guest with the long hair was an unknown painter, to whom Rushbrook had given a commission for three hundred yards of painted canvas, to be cut up and framed as occasion and space required, in Rushbrook's new hotel in San Francisco; how the grey bearded foreigner near him was an accomplished bibliophil who was furnishing Mr. Rushbrook's library from spoils of foreign collections, and had suffered unheard of agonies from the millionaire's insisting upon a handsome uniform binding that should deprive certain precious but musty tomes of their crumbling, worm-eaten coverings; how the very gentle, clerical looking stranger, mildest of a noisy, disputing

crowd at the other table, was a notorious duellist and dead shot; how the only gentleman at the table who retained a flannel shirt and high boots, was not a late-coming mountaineer but a well-known English baronet on his travels; how the man who told a somewhat florid and emphatic anecdote, was a popular Eastern clergyman; how the one querulous, discontented face in a laughing group was the famous humourist who had just convulsed it; and how a pale, handsome young fellow, who ate and drank sparingly and disregarded the coquettish advances of the prettiest *Diva* with the cold abstraction of a student, was a notorious *roué* and gambler. But there was a sudden and unlooked for change of criticism and critic.

The festivity had reached that stage when the guests were more or less accessible to emotion, and more or less touched by the astounding fact that each other was enjoying himself. This phenomenon which is apt to burst into song or dance among other races, is constrained to voice itself in an Anglo-Saxon gathering by some explanation, apology, or moral—known as an after-dinner speech. Thus it was that the gentleman from Siskyou who had been from time to time casting glances at Somers and his fair companion at the head of the table, now rose

to his feet, albeit unsteadily, pushed back his chair, and began:

"'Pears to me, ladies and gentlemen, and feller pardners, that on an occasion like this, suthin' oughter be said of the man who got it up—whose money paid fer it, and who ain't here to speak for himself, except by deputy. Yet you all know that's Bob Rushbrook's style—he ain't here, because he's full of some other plan or improvements—and it's like him to start suthin' of this kind, give it its aim and purpose, and then stand aside to let somebody else run it for him. There ain't no man livin' ez hes, so to speak, more fast horses ready saddled, and more fast men ready spurred to ride 'em—whether to win his races or run his errands. There ain't no man livin' ez knows how to make other men's games his, or his game seem to be other men's. And from Jack Somers smilin' over there, ez knows where to get the best wine that Bob pays for, and knows how to run this yer show for Bob, at Bob's expense—we're all contented. Ladies and gentlemen, we're all contented. We stand, so to speak, on the cards he's dealt us. What may be his little game, it ain't for us to say; but whatever it is, *we're in it.* Gentlemen and ladies, we'll drink Bob's health!"

There was a somewhat sensational pause, followed by good-natured laughter and applause, in which Somers joined; yet not without a certain constraint that did not escape the quick sympathy of the shocked and unsmiling Miss Nevil. It was with a feeling of relief that she caught the chaperoning eye of Mrs. Leyton, who was entreating her in the usual mysterious signal to the other ladies to rise and follow her. When she reached the drawing room, a little behind the others, she was somewhat surprised to observe that the stranger whom she had missed during the evening was approaching her with Mrs. Leyton.

"Mr. Rushbrook returned sooner than he expected, but unfortunately as he always retires early, he has only time to say 'good night' to you before he goes."

For an instant Grace Nevil was more angry than disconcerted. Then came the conviction that she was stupid not to have suspected the truth before. Who else would that brusque stranger develope into but this rude host? She bowed formally.

Mr. Rushbrook looked at her with the faintest smile on his handsome mouth. "Well, Miss Nevil, I hope Jack Somers satisfied your curiosity?"

With a sudden recollection of the Siskyou gen-

tleman's speech, and a swift suspicion that in some way she had been made use of with the others by this forceful looking man before her, she answered pertly:

"Yes; but there was a speech by a gentleman from Siskyou that struck me as being nearer to the purpose."

"That's so—I heard it as I came in," said Rushbrook calmly. "I don't know but you're right."

CHAPTER IV.

Six months had passed. The Villa of Mecænas was closed at Los Osos Cañon, and the south west trade winds were slanting the rains of the wet season against its shut windows and barred doors. Within that hollow, deserted shell, its aspect—save for a single exception—was unchanged; the furniture and decorations preserved their eternal youth undimmed by time; the rigidly arranged rooms, now closed to life and light, developed more than ever their resemblance to a furniture warehouse. The single exception was the room which Grace Nevil had re-

arranged for herself; that, oddly enough, was stripped and bare—even to its paper and mouldings.

In other respects the sealed treasures of Rushbrook's villa, far from provoking any sentimentality, seemed only to give truth to the current rumour that it was merely waiting to be transformed into a gorgeous watering-place hotel under Rushbrook's direction; that, with its new ball-room changed into an elaborate dining hall, it would undergo still further improvement, the inevitable end and object of all Rushbrook's enterprise, and that its former proprietor had already begun another villa whose magnificence should eclipse the last. There certainly appeared to be no limit to the millionaire's success in all that he personally undertook, or in his fortunate complicity with the enterprise and invention of others. His name was associated with the oldest and safest schemes, as well as the newest and boldest—with an equal guarantee of security. A few, it was true, looked doubtingly upon this "one man power," but could not refute the fact that others had largely benefited by association with him, and that he shared his profits with a royal hand. Some objected on higher grounds to his brutalising the influence of wealth by his material and extravagantly practical processes, instead of the gentler suggestions

of education and personal example, and were impelled to point out the fact that he and his patronage were vulgar. It was felt, however, by those who received his benefits, that a proper sense of this inferiority was all that ethics demanded of them. One could still accept Rushbrook's barbaric gifts by humorously recognising the fact that he didn't know any better and that it pleased him, as long as they resented any higher pretensions. The rain-beaten windows of Rushbrook's town house, however, were cheerfully lit that December evening. He seldom dined alone; it was said that very often the unfinished business of the day was concluded over his bountiful and perfect board. He was dressing as James entered the room.

"Mr. Leyton is in your study, sir; he will stay to dinner."

"All right."

"I think, sir," added James, with respectful suggestiveness, "he wants to talk. At least, sir, he asked me if you would likely come downstairs before your company arrived."

"Ah! Well, tell the others I'm dining on *business,* and set dinner for two in the blue room."

"Yes, sir."

Meantime Mr. Leyton—a man of Rushbrook's

age, but not so fresh and vigorous looking—had thrown himself in a chair beside the study fire, after a glance around the handsome and familiar room. For the house had belonged to a brother millionaire —it had changed hands with certain shares of "Water Front," as some of Rushbrook's dealings had the true barbaric absence of money detail—and was elegantly and tastefully furnished. The cuckoo had, however, already laid a few characteristic eggs in this adopted nest, and a white marble statue of a nude and chilly Virtue, sent over by Rushbrook's Paris agent and unpacked that morning, stood in one corner, and materially brought down the temperature. A Japanese praying throne of pure ivory, and, above it, a few yards of improper coloured exposure by an old master, equalised each other.

"And what is all this affair about the dinner?" suddenly asked a tartly-pitched female voice with a foreign accent.

Mr. Leyton turned quickly, and was just conscious of a faint shriek, the rustle of a skirt, and the swift vanishing of a woman's figure from the doorway. Mr. Leyton turned red. Rushbrook lived *en garçon,* with feminine possibilities; Leyton was a married man and a deacon. The incident which, to a man of the world, would have brought only a

smile, fired the inexperienced Leyton with those exaggerated ideas and intense credulity regarding vice common to some very good men. He walked on tip-toe to the door, and peered into the passage. At that moment Rushbrook entered from the opposite door of the room.

"Well," said Rushbrook, with his usual practical directness, "what do you think of her?"

Leyton, still flushed and with eyebrows slightly knit, said, awkwardly, that he had scarcely seen her.

"She cost me already ten thousand dollars, and I suppose I'll have to eventually fix up a separate room for her somewhere," continued Rushbrook.

"I should certainly advise it," said Leyton, quickly, "for really, Rushbrook, you know that something is due to the respectable people who come here, and any of them are likely to see—"

"Ah!—" interrupted Rushbrook, seriously, "you think she hasn't got on clothes enough. Why, look here, old man—this is one of the Virtues, and that's the rig in which they always travel. She's a 'Temperance' or a 'Charity' or a 'Resignation,' or something of that kind. You'll find her name there in French somewhere at the foot of the marble."

Leyton saw his mistake, but felt—as others sometimes felt—a doubt whether this smileless man

was not inwardly laughing at him. He replied, with a keen rapid glance at his host,

"I was referring to some woman who stood in that doorway just now, and addressed me rather familiarly, thinking it was you."

"O, the Signora," said Rushbrook, with undisturbed directness; "well you saw her at Los Osos last summer. Likely she *did* think you were me."

The cool ignoring of any ulterior thought in Leyton's objection forced the guest to be equally practical in his reply.

"Yes, but the fact is that Miss Nevil had talked of coming here with me this evening to see you on her own affairs, and it wouldn't have been exactly the thing for her to meet that woman."

"She wouldn't," said Rushbrook, promptly, "nor would *you* if you had gone into the parlour as Miss Nevil would have done. But look here! If that's the reason why you didn't bring her, send for her at once, my coachman can take a card from you; the brougham's all ready to fetch her, and there you are. She'll see only you and me." He was already moving towards the bell, when Leyton stopped him.

"No matter now. I can tell you her business I

fancy; and in fact I came here to speak of it, quite independently of her."

"That won't do, Leyton," interrupted Rushbrook, with crisp decision, "one or the other interview is unnecessary, it wastes time and isn't business. Better have her present, even if she don't say a word."

"Yes, but not in this matter," responded Leyton; "it's about Somers. You know he's been very attentive to her ever since her uncle left her here to recruit her health, and I think she fancies him. Well, although she's independent and her own mistress as you know, Mrs. Leyton and I are somewhat responsible for her acquaintance with Somers—and for that matter so are you—and as my wife thinks it means a marriage, we ought to know something more positive about Somers' prospects. Now, all we really know is that he's a great friend of yours, that you trust a good deal to him; that he manages your social affairs, that you treat him as a son or nephew, and it's generally believed that he's as good as provided for by you—eh? Did you speak?"

"No," said Rushbrook, quietly regarding the statue as if taking its measurement for a suitable apartment for it. "Go on."

"Well," said Leyton, a little impatiently, "that's

the belief everybody has, and you've not contradicted it. And on that we've taken the responsibility of not interfering with Somer's attentions."

"Well?" said Rushbrook, interrogatively.

"Well," replied Leyton emphatically, "you see I must ask you positively if you *have* done anything, or are going to do anything for him?"

"Well?" replied Rushbrook with exasperating coolness, "what do you call this marriage?"

"I don't understand you," said Leyton.

"Look here, Leyton," said Rushbrook suddenly and abruptly facing him; "Jack Somers has brains, knowledge of society, tact, accomplishments, and good looks. That's *his* capital as much as mine is money. I employ him; that's his advertisement, recommendation and credit. Now, on the strength of this, as you say, Miss Nevil is willing to invest in him; I don't see what more can be done."

"But if her uncle don't think it enough?"

"She's independent and has money for both."

"But if she thinks she's been deceived, and changes her mind?"

"Leyton, you don't know Miss Nevil. Whatever that girl undertakes she's weighed fully and goes through with. If she's trusted him enough to marry

him, money won't stop her; if she thinks she's been deceived you'll never know it."

The enthusiasm and conviction were so unlike Rushbrook's usual cynical toleration of the sex that Leyton stared at him.

"That's odd," he returned. "That's what she says of you."

"Of *me;* you mean Somers?"

"No, of *you.* Come, Rushbrook, don't pretend you don't know that Miss Nevil is a great partisan of yours, swears by you, says you're misunderstood by people, and, what's infernally odd in a woman who don't belong to the class you fancy, don't talk of your habits. That's why she wants to consult you about Somers, I suppose, and that's why, knowing you might influence her, I came here first to warn you."

"And I've told you that whatever I might say or do wouldn't influence her. So we'll drop the subject."

"Not yet; for you're bound to see Miss Nevil sooner or later. Now, if she knows that you've done nothing for this man, your friend and her lover, won't she be justified in thinking that you have a reason for it?"

"Yes. I should give it."

"What reason?"

"That I knew she'd be more contented to have him speculate with *her* money than mine."

"Then you think that he isn't a business man?"

"I think that she thinks so, or she wouldn't marry him; it's part of the attraction. But come, James has been for five minutes discreetly waiting outside the door to tell us dinner is ready and the coast clear of all other company. But look here," he said, suddenly stopping, with his arm in Leyton's, "you're through your talk, I suppose; perhaps you'd rather we'd dine with the Signora and the others than alone?"

For an instant Leyton thrilled with the fascination of what he firmly believed was a guilty temptation. Rushbrook, perceiving his hesitation, added:

"By the way, Somers is of the party, and one or two others you know."

Mr. Leyton opened his eyes widely at this; either the temptation had passed, or the idea of being seen in doubtful company by a younger man was distasteful, for he hurriedly disclaimed any preference. "But," he added with half-significant politeness, "perhaps I'm keeping *you* from them?"

"It makes not the slightest difference to me,"

calmly returned Rushbrook with such evident truthfulness that Leyton was both convinced and chagrined.

Preceded by the grave and ubiquitous James, they crossed the large hall and entered through a smaller passage a charming apartment hung with blue damask, which might have been a boudoir, study, or small reception room, yet had the air of never having been anything continuously. It would seem that Rushbrook's habit of "camping out" in different parts of his mansion obtained here as at Los Osos, and with the exception of a small closet which contained his Spartan bed, the rooms were used separately or in suites as occasion or his friends required. It is recorded that an Eastern guest, newly arrived with letters to Rushbrook, after a tedious journey, expressed himself highly pleased with this same blue room, in which he had sumptuously dined with his host, and subsequently fell asleep in his chair. Without disturbing his guest, Rushbrook had the table removed, a bed, washstand and bureau brought in, the sleeping man delicately laid upon the former, and left to awaken to an Arabian night's realisation of his wish.

CHAPTER V.

JAMES had barely disposed of his master and Mr. Leyton, and left them to the ministrations of two of his underlings, before he was confronted with one of those difficult problems that it was part of his functions to solve. The porter informed him that a young lady had just driven up in a carriage ostensibly to see Mr. Rushbrook, and James, descending to the outer vestibule, found himself face to face with Miss Grace Nevil. Happily that young lady, with her usual tact, spared him some embarrassment.

"Oh, James," she said sweetly, "do you think that I could see Mr. Rushbrook for a few moments *if I waited for the opportunity?* You understand, I don't wish to disturb him or his company by being regularly announced."

The young girl's practical intelligence appeared to increase the usual respect which James had always shown her. "I understand, Miss." He thought for a moment, and said: "Would you mind, then, following me where you could wait quietly and alone?" As she quickly assented, he preceded her up the

staircase, past the study and drawing room, which he did not enter, and stopped before a small door at the end of the passage. Then handing her a key which he took from his pocket, he said: "This is the only room in the house that is strictly reserved for Mr. Rushbrook and even he rarely uses it. You can wait here without anybody knowing it until I can communicate with him and bring you to his study unobserved. And," he hesitated, "if you wouldn't mind locking the door when you are in, Miss, you would be more secure, and I will knock when I come for you."

Grace Nevil smiled at the man's prudence, and entered the room. But to her great surprise she had scarcely shut the door when she was instantly struck with a singular memory which the apartment recalled. It was exactly like the room she had altered in Rushbrook's villa at Los Osos! More than that, on close examination it proved to be the very same furniture, arranged as she remembered to have arranged it, even to the flowers and grasses, now, alas, faded and withered on the walls. There could be no mistake. There was the open ebony *escritoire* with the satin blotter open, and its leaves still bearing the marks of her own handwriting. So complete to her mind was the idea of her own tenancy in

this bachelor's mansion, that she looked around with a half-indignant alarm for the photograph or portrait of herself that might further indicate it. But there was no other exposition. The only thing that had been added was a gilt legend on the satin case of the blotter—"Los Osos, 20th August, 186—," the day she had occupied the room.

She was pleased, astonished, but more than all, disturbed. The only man who might claim a right to this figurative possession of her tastes and habits was the one whom she had quietly, reflectively and understandingly half accepted as her lover, and on whose account she had come to consult Rushbrook. But Somers was not a sentimentalist; in fact, as a young girl forced by her independent position to somewhat critically scrutinize masculine weaknesses, this had always been a point in his favour; yet even if he had joined with his friend Rushbrook to perpetuate the memory of their first acquaintanceship, his taste merely would not have selected a *chambre de garçon* in Mr. Rushbrook's home for its exhibition. Her conception of the opposite characters of the two men was singularly distinct and real, and this momentary confusion of them was disagreeable to her woman's sense. But at this moment James came to release her and conduct her to Rushbrook's study,

where he would join her at once. Everything had been arranged as she had wished.

Even a more practical man than Rushbrook might have lingered for a moment over the tall, graceful figure of Miss Nevil quietly enthroned in a large arm-chair by the fire, her scarlet satin-lined cloak thrown over its back, and her chin resting on her hand. But the millionaire walked directly towards her with his usual frankness of conscious but restrained power, and she felt, as she always did, perfectly at her ease in his presence. Even as she took his outstretched hand, its straightforward grasp seemed to endow her with its own confidence.

"You'll excuse my coming here so abruptly," she smiled, "but I wanted to get before Mr. Leyton, who, I believe, wishes to see you on the same business as myself."

"He is here already, and dining with me," said Rushbrook.

"Ah!—does he know I am here?" asked the girl, quietly.

"No—as he said you had thought of coming with him and didn't, I presumed you didn't want it known."

"Not exactly that, Mr. Rushbrook," she said, fixing her beautiful eyes on him in bright and trust-

ful confidence, "but I happen to have a fuller knowledge of this business than he has, and yet, as it is not altogether my own secret, I was not permitted to divulge it to him. Nor would I tell it to you, only I cannot bear that you should think that I had anything to do with this wretched inquisition into Mr. Somers' prospects. Knowing as well as you do how perfectly independent I am, you would think it strange, wouldn't you? but you would think it still more surprising when you found out that I and my uncle already know how liberally and generously you had provided for Mr. Somers in the future."

"How I had provided for Mr. Somers in the future?" repeated Mr. Rushbrook, looking at the fire, "eh?"

"Yes," said the young girl, indifferently, "how you were to put him in to succeed you in the Water Front Trust, and all that. He told it to me and my uncle at the outset of our acquaintance, confidentially, of course, and I dare say with an honourable delicacy that was like him, but—I suppose now you will think me foolish—all the while I'd rather he had not."

"You'd rather he had not," repeated Mr. Rushbrook, slowly.

"Yes," continued Grace, leaning forward with

her rounded elbows on her knees, and her slim, arched feet on the fender, "Now you are going to laugh at me, Mr. Rushbrook, but all this seemed to me to spoil any spontaneous feeling I might have towards him, and limit my independence in a thing that should be a matter of free will alone. It seemed too much like a business proposition! There! my kind friend!" she added, looking up and trying to read his face with a half girlish pout, followed, however, by a maturer sigh, "I'm bothering you with a woman's foolishness instead of talking business. And—" another sigh—"I suppose it *is* business, for my uncle, who has, it seems, bought into this Trust on these possible contingencies, has, perhaps, been asking questions of Mr. Leyton. But I don't want you to think that I approve of them, or advise your answering them. But you are not listening."

"I had forgotten something," said Rushbrook, with sudden pre-occupation. "Excuse me a moment —I will return at once."

He left the room quite as abruptly, but when he reached the passage he apparently could not remember what he had forgotten, as he walked deliberately to the end window, where, with his arms folded behind his back, he remained looking out into the street. A passer-by, glancing up, might

have said he had seen the ghost of Mr. Rushbrook, framed like a stony portrait in the window. But he presently turned away and re-entered the room, going up to Grace, who was still sitting by the fire, in his usual strong and direct fashion.

"Well! Now let me see what you want. I think this would do."

He took a seat at his open desk and rapidly wrote a few lines.

"There," he continued, "when you write to your uncle, enclose that."

Grace took it and read:

"DEAR MISS NEVIL,

"Pray assure your uncle from me that I am quite ready to guarantee, in any form that he may require, the undertaking represented to him by Mr. John Somers.

"Yours very truly,

"ROBERT RUSHBROOK."

A quick flush mounted to the young girl's cheeks. "But this is a *security,* Mr. Rushbrook," she said, proudly, handing him back the paper, "and my uncle does not require that. Nor shall I insult him or you by sending it."

"It is *business,* Miss Nevil," said Rushbrook, gravely. He stopped, and fixed his eyes upon her animated face and sparkling eyes. "You can send it to him or not, as you like. But," a rare smile came to his handsome mouth, "as this is a letter to *you,* you must not insult *me* by not receiving it."

Replying to his smile rather than the words that accompanied it, Miss Nevil smiled too. Nevertheless she was uneasy and disturbed. The interview, whatever she might have vaguely expected from it, had resolved itself simply into a business endorsement of her lover, which she had not sought, and which gave her no satisfaction. Yet there was the same potent and indefinably protecting presence before her which she had sought, but whose omniscience and whose help she seemed to have lost the spell and courage to put to the test. He relieved her in his abrupt but not unkindly fashion. "Well, when is it to be?"

"It?"

"Your marriage."

"Oh, not for some time. There's no hurry."

It might have struck the practical Mr. Rushbrook that, even considered as a desirable business affair, the prospective completion of this contract provoked neither frank satisfaction nor conventional dissimula-

tion on the part of the young lady, for he regarded her calm but slightly wearied expression fixedly. But he only said: "Then I shall say nothing of this interview to Mr. Leyton?"

"As you please. It really matters little. Indeed, I suppose I was rather foolish in coming at all, and wasting your valuable time for nothing."

She had risen, as if taking his last question in the significance of a parting suggestion, and was straightening her tall figure preparatory to putting on her cloak. As she reached it he stepped forward and lifted it from the chair to assist her. The act was so unprecedented, as Mr. Rushbrook never indulged in those minor masculine courtesies, that she was momentarily as confused as a younger girl at the gallantry of a younger man. In their previous friendship he had seldom approached her even to shake her hand—a circumstance that had always recurred to her when his free and familiar life had been the subject of gossip. But she now had a more frightened consciousness that her nerves were strangely responding to his powerful propinquity, and she involuntarily contracted her pretty shoulders as he gently laid the cloak upon them. Yet even when the act was completed, she had a superstitious instinct that the significance of this rare courtesy

was that it was final, and that he had helped her to interpose something that shut him out from her for ever.

She was turning away with a heightened colour, when the sound of light hurried footsteps and the rustle of a woman's dress was heard in the hall. A swift recollection of her companion's infelicitous reputation forced itself upon her, and Grace Nevil, with a slight stiffening of her whole frame, became coldly herself again. Mr. Rushbrook betrayed neither surprise nor agitation. Begging her to wait a moment until he could arrange for her to pass to her carriage unnoticed, he left the room.

Nevertheless the cause of the disturbance was unsuspected by Mr. Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton, although left to the consolation of cigars and liquors in the Blue room, had become slightly weary of his companion's prolonged absence. Satisfied in his mind that Rushbrook had joined the gayer party, and that he was even now paying gallant court to the Signora, he became again curious and uneasy. At last the unmistakeable sound of whispering voices in the passage got the better of his sense of courtesy as a guest, and he rose from his seat and slightly opened the door. As he did so the figures of a man and woman, conversing in earnest whispers, passed the

opening. The man's arm was round the woman's waist; the woman was—as he had suspected—the one who had stood in the doorway—the Signora—but the man was *not* Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton drew back this time in unaffected horror. It was none other than Jack Somers!

Some warning instinct must at that moment have struck the woman, for with a stifled cry she disengaged herself from Somers' arms, and dashed rapidly down the hall. Somers evidently unaware of the cause, stood irresolute for a moment, and then more silently, but swiftly disappeared into a side corridor as if to intercept her. It was the rapid passage of the Signora that had attracted the attention of the occupants of the study, and it was the moment after that Mr. Rushbrook left it.

CHAPTER VI.

VAGUELY uneasy and still perplexed with her previous agitation, as Mr. Rushbrook closed the door behind him, Grace, following some feminine instinct rather than any definite reason, walked to the door and placed her hand upon the lock to prevent any

intrusion until he returned. Her caution seemed to be justified a moment later, for a heavier but stealthier footstep halted outside. The handle of the door was turned, but she resisted it with the fullest strength of her small hand until a voice, which startled her, called in a hurried whisper:

"Open quick, 'tis I."

She stepped back quickly, flung the door open and beheld Somers on the threshold!

The astonishment, agitation, and above all, the awkward confusion of this usually self-possessed and ready man, was so unlike him, and withal so painful, that Grace hurried to put an end to it, and for an instant forgot her own surprise at seeing him. She smiled assuringly, and extended her hand.

"Grace—Miss Nevil—I beg your pardon—I didn't imagine"—he began with a forced laugh. "I mean, of course—I cannot—but——." He stopped, and then assuming a peculiar expression, said: "But what are *you* doing here?"

At any other moment the girl would have resented the tone, which was as new to her as his previous agitation, but in her present self-consciousness her situation seemed to require some explanation. "I came here," she said, "to see Mr. Rushbrook on business. Your business—*our* business,"

she added, with a charming smile, using for the first time the pronoun that seemed to indicate their unity and interest, and yet fully aware of a vague insincerity in doing so.

"Our *business*?" he repeated, ignoring her gentler meaning with a changed emphasis and a look of suspicion.

"Yes," said Grace, a little impatiently. "Mr. Leyton thought he ought to write to my uncle something positive as to your prospects with Mr. Rushbrook, and——"

"You came here to inquire?" said the young man, sharply.

"I came here to stop any inquiry," said Grace, indignantly. "I came here to say *I* was satisfied with what you had confided to me of Mr. Rushbrook's generosity, and that was enough!"

"With what *I* had confided to you? You dared say that?"

Grace stopped and instantly faced him. But any indignation she might have felt at his speech and manner was swallowed up in the revulsion and horror that overtook her with the sudden revelation she saw in his white and frantic face. Leyton's strange inquiry, Rushbrook's cold composure and scornful acceptance of her own credulousness, came

to her in a flash of shameful intelligence. Somers had lied! The insufferable meanness of it! A lie, whose very uselessness and ignobility had defeated its purpose—a lie that implied such a base suspicion of her own independence and truthfulness—stood out as plainly before her as his guilty face.

"Forgive my speaking so rudely," he said with a forced smile and an attempt to recover his self-control, "but you have ruined me unless you deny that I told you anything. It was a joke—an extravagance that I had forgotten; at least, it was a confidence between you and me that you have foolishly violated. Say that you misunderstood me—that it was a fancy of your own. Say anything—he trusts you—he'll believe anything you say."

"He *has* believed me," said Grace, almost fiercely, turning upon him with the paper that Rushbrook had given her in her outstretched hand. "Read that!"

He read it. Had he blushed, had he stammered, had he even kept up his former frantic and pitiable attitude, she might at that supreme moment have forgiven him. But to her astonishment his face changed, his handsome brow cleared, his careless, happy smile returned, his graceful confidence came back—he stood before her the elegant, courtly, and

accomplished gentleman she had known. He returned her the paper, and advancing with extended hand, said triumphantly:

"Superb! Splendid! No one but a woman could think of that! And only one woman achieve it. You have tricked the great Rushbrook. You are indeed worthy of being a financier's wife!"

"No," she said passionately, tearing up the paper and throwing it at his feet; "not as *you* understand it—and never *yours!* You have debased and polluted everything connected with it as you would have debased and polluted me. Out of my presence that you are insulting—out of the room of the man whose magnanimity you cannot understand!"

The destruction of the guarantee apparently stung him more than the words that accompanied it. He did not relapse again into his former shamefaced terror, but as a malignant glitter came into his eyes, he regained his coolness.

"It may not be so difficult for others to understand, Miss Nevil," he said, with polished insolence, "and as Bob Rushbrook's generosity to pretty women is already a matter of suspicion, perhaps you are wise to destroy that record of it."

"Coward!" said Grace, "stand aside and let me pass!" She swept by him to the door. But it

opened upon Rushbrook's re-entrance. He stood for an instant glancing at the pair, and then on the fragments of the paper that strewed the floor. Then, still holding the door in his hand, he said quietly:

"One moment before you go, Miss Nevil. If this is the result of any misunderstanding as to the presence of another woman here, in company with Mr. Somers, it is only fair to him to say that that woman is here as a friend of *mine,* not of his, and I alone am responsible."

Grace halted and turned the cold steel of her proud eyes on the two men. As they rested on Rushbrook they quivered slightly. "I can already bear witness," she said coldly, "to the generosity of Mr. Rushbrook, in a matter which then touched me. But there certainly is no necessity for him to show it now in a matter in which I have not the slightest concern."

As she swept out of the room and was received in the respectable shadow of the waiting James, Rushbrook turned to Somers.

"And *I'm* afraid it won't do—for Leyton saw you," he said curtly. "Now then, shut that door, for you and I, Jack Somers, have a word to say to each other."

What that word was, and how it was said and

received, is not a part of this record. But it is told that it was the beginning of that mighty Iliad, still remembered of men, which shook the financial camps of San Francisco, and divided them into bitter contending parties. For when it became known the next day that Somers had suddenly parted from Rushbrook, and carried over to a powerful foreign capitalist the secret methods, and even, it was believed, the *luck* of his late employer, it was certain that there would be war to the knife, and that it was no longer a struggle of rival enterprise, but of vindictive men.

CHAPTER VII.

For a year the battle between the Somers faction and the giant but solitary Rushbrook raged fiercely, with varying success. I grieve to say that the *protégés* and parasites of Mecænas deserted him in a body; nay they openly alleged that it was the true artistic nature and refinement of Somers that had always attracted them, and that a man like Rushbrook who bought pictures by the yard—equally of the unknown struggling artist and the famous masters

—was no true patron of Art. Rushbrook made no attempt to recover his lost prestige, and once, when squeezed into a tight "corner," and forced to realise on his treasures, he put them up at auction and the people called them "daubs;" their rage knew no bounds. It was then that an unfettered press discovered that Rushbrook never was a Mecænas at all, grimly deprecated his assumption of that title, and even doubted if he were truly a millionaire. It was at this time that a few stood by him—notably, the mill inventor from Siskyou, grown plethoric with success, but eventually ground between the upper and nether millstone of the Somers and Rushbrook party. Miss Nevil had returned to the Atlantic States with Mrs. Leyton. While rumours had played freely with the relations of Somers and the Signora, as the possible cause of the rupture between him and Rushbrook, no mention had ever been made of the name of Miss Nevil.

It was raining heavily one afternoon, when Mr Rushbrook drove from his office to his San Francisco house. The fierce struggle in which he was engaged left him little time for hospitality, and for the last two weeks his house had been comparatively deserted. He passed through the empty rooms, changed in little except the absence of some valuable

monstrosities, which had gone to replenish his capital. When he reached his bed-room, he paused a moment at the open door.

"James!"

"Yes, sir," said James, appearing out of the shadow.

"What are you waiting for?"

"I thought you might be wanting something, sir."

"You were waiting there this morning; you were in the anteroom of my study while I was writing. You were outside the blue room while I sat at breakfast. You were at my elbow in the drawing-room late last night. Now, James," continued Mr. Rushbrook, with his usual grave directness, "I don't intend to commit suicide; I can't afford it, so keep your time and your rest for yourself—you want it —that's a good fellow."

"Yes, sir."

"James!"

"Yes, sir."

Rushbrook extended his hand. There was that faint rare smile on his handsome mouth, for which James would at any time have laid down his life. But he only silently grasped his master's hand, and the two men remained looking into each other's eyes

without a word. Then Mr. Rushbrook entered his room, lay down and went to sleep, and James vanished in the shadow.

At the end of an hour, Mr. Rushbrook awoke refreshed, and even James, who came to call him, appeared to have brightened in the interval. "I have ordered a fire, sir, in the reserved room, the one fitted up from Los Osos, as your study has had no chance of being cleaned these two weeks. It will be a change for you, sir. I hope you'll excuse my not waking you to consult you about it."

Rushbrook remained so silent, that James, fancying he had not heard him, was about to repeat himself when his master said quickly, "Very well, come for me there when dinner is ready," and entered the passage leading to the room. James did not follow him, and when Mr. Rushbrook, opening the door, started back with an exclamation, no one but the inmate heard the word that rose to his lips.

For there, seated before the glow of the blazing fire, was Miss Grace Nevil. She had evidently just arrived, for her mantle was barely loosened around her neck, and upon the fringe of brown hair between her bonnet and her broad, low forehead a few drops of rain still sparkled. As she lifted her long lashes quickly towards the door it seemed as if they

too had caught a little of that moisture. Rushbrook moved impatiently forward, and then stopped. Grace rose unhesitatingly to her feet and met him half-way with frankly outstretched hands. "First of all," she said, with a half nervous laugh, "don't scold James; it's all my fault; I forbade him to announce me, lest you should drive me away, for I heard that during this excitement you came here for rest, and saw no one. Even the intrusion into this room is all my own. I confess now that I saw it the last night I was here; I was anxious to know if it was unchanged, and made James bring me here. I did not understand it then. I do now—and—thank you."

Her face must have shown that she was conscious that he was still holding her hand, for he suddenly released it. With a heightened colour and a half-girlish *naïveté,* that was the more charming for its contrast with her tall figure and air of thorough-bred repose, she turned back to her chair and lightly motioned him to take the one before her. "I am here on *business;* otherwise I should not have dared to look in upon you at all."

She stopped, drew off her gloves with a provoking deliberation, which was none the less fascinating that it implied a demure consciousness of inducing

more or less impatience in the breast of her companion, stretched them out carefully by the fingers, laid them down neatly on the table, placed her elbows on her knees, slightly clasped her hands together, and bending forward lifted her honest handsome eyes to the man before her.

"Mr. Rushbrook, I have got between four and five hundred thousand dollars that I have no use for; I can control securities which can be converted, if necessary, into a hundred thousand more in ten days. I am free and my own mistress. It is generally considered that I know what I am about—you admitted as much when I was your pupil. I have come here to place this sum in your hands, at your free disposal. You know why and for what purpose."

"But what do you know of my affairs?" asked Rushbrook quickly.

"Everything, and I know *you*, which is better. Call it an investment if you like—for I know you will succeed—and let me share your profits. Call it—if you please—restitution, for I am the miserable cause of your rupture with that man. Or call it revenge if you like," she said with a faint smile, "and let me fight at your side against our common enemy! Please, Mr. Rushbrook, don't deny me this.

I have come three thousand miles for it; I could have sent it to you—or written—but I feared you would not understand it. You are smiling—you will take it?"

"I cannot," said Rushbrook gravely.

"Then you force me to go into the Stock Market myself and fight for you, and, unaided by your genius, lose it without benefiting you."

Rushbrook did not reply.

"At least, then, tell me why you 'cannot.'"

Rushbrook rose, and looking into her face, said quietly with his old directness:

"Because I love you, Miss Nevil."

A sudden instinct to rise and move away, a greater one to remain and hear him speak again, and a still greater one to keep back the blood that she felt was returning all too quickly to her cheek after the first shock, kept her silent. But she dropped her eyes.

"I loved you ever since I first saw you at Los Osos," he went on quietly; "I said to myself even then, that if there was a woman that would fill my life and make me what she wished me to be, it was you. I even fancied that day that you understood me better than any woman, or even any man, that I had ever met before. I loved you through all that

miserable business with that man, even when my failure to make you happy with another brought me no nearer to you. I have loved you always. I shall love you always. I love you more for this foolish kindness that brings *you* beneath my roof once more, and gives me a chance to speak my heart to you, if only once and for the last time, than all the fortune that you could put at my disposal. But I cannot accept what you would offer me from any woman who was not my wife—and I could not marry any woman that did not love me. I am perhaps past the age when I could inspire a young girl's affection; but I have not reached the age when I would accept anything less." He stopped abruptly. Grace did not look up. There was a tear glistening upon her long eyelashes, albeit a faint smile played upon her lips.

"Do you call this business, Mr. Rushbrook?" she said softly.

"Business?"

"To assume a proposal declined before it has been offered."

"Grace—my darling—tell me—is it possible?"

It was too late for her to rise now, as his hands held both hers, and his handsome mouth was smiling level with her own. So it really seemed to

a dispassionate spectator that it *was* possible, and before she had left the room, it even appeared to be the most probable thing in the world.

* * * * * *

The union of Grace Nevil and Robert Rushbrook was recorded by local history as the crown to his victory over the Ring. But only he and his wife knew that it was the cause.

THE END.

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