TWO GENTLEMEN of VIRGINIA

GEORGE-CARY-EGGLESTON

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A NOVEL OF THE OLD REGIME IN THE OLD DOMINION

BY

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TWO GENTLEMEN OF VIRGINIA

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General

TO THE MEMORY OF

Chastain Cocke

OF VIRGINIA

WHOSE NOBILITY OF CHARACTER, GENEROSITY OF MIND, AND UPRIGHTNESS OF LIFE WERE AN INSPIRATION TO ME IN YOUTH, AND WHOSE PERSONALITY IS IMPERFECTLY SUGGESTED IN THAT OF COLONEL BUTLER SHENSTONE I INSCRIBE THIS STORY OF THE OLD REGIME IN THE OLD DOMINION, WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE.

PREFACE

In this novel I have endeavored to fulfil one of the chief functions of history in the modern conception of historical writing.

Incidentally to the telling of a love story, I have sought to present a faithful picture of the life of the time and region of which I have written; to set forth its manners, habits and conditions with accuracy and in detail; to portray the character of the people, to show what were their ideals and their standards, and to present them as they were to readers of a later and far less picturesque time.

In aid of this purpose I have mentioned many details of custom and condition which may seem trivial in themselves, but which are imperatively necessary to the verisimilitude of the picture.

It is proper to add that I have written solely of things that I personally remember. As a youth I was brought into that life from with-

out. I studied it in perspective, as one bred in it could not have done. I lived it and loved it, and now, half a century later, I write of it with admiration, if not always with approval.

GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON.

New York City, 1908.

Illustrations

Two Gentlemen of Virginia

I

ABOUT eight o'clock on an evening in June of the year 1857, a very noticeable young man entered the Exchange Hotel and Ballard House,— the twin hotels that had recently been connected by a crystal bridge spanning Franklin street, just east of the Capitol Square, in Richmond, Virginia.

He had come from the railroad train in a cab, and his trunks and handbags, several in number, were following him into the great office room of the hotel, on the willing backs of negro porters who interpreted their number and "style" as a promise of generous tips to come.

The young man bowed politely to the clerk, said "Good evening," in a low, attractive but very resonant voice — the voice of a man ac-

customed to make himself heard without effort — and registered his name as

"PHILIP SHENSTONE,"

and his residence as

"THE WEST."

Before writing he carelessly tossed to one of the negro servitors the overcoat he had carried on his arm. The negro interpreted the act as a promise. The carrying of any overcoat at all by a traveler in Virginia in June was a thing of so rare occurrence in those days that it would of itself have attracted the attention of the all-observant hotel clerk. But the quality and fashioning of this particular overcoat were still more impressive upon the clerk's mind. From the overcoat his quickly scrutinizing glance passed to the young man's other garments. In an instant he had decided that this was altogether the best dressed gentleman who had ever registered at that hotel during his period of service there. The young man's costume was wholly unobtrusive, but the clerk observed that his garments were made of the very finest fabrics he had ever seen, that they were exquisitely finished in every detail and

that there was absolute perfection in the way they fitted their wearer — unconscious, as he seemed to be even of their existence.

The clerk's first conclusion was that here was a man accustomed to wearing good clothes and never thinking about them.

The effect was helped, perhaps, by the unusual symmetry of the young man's person. He was a trifle under six feet in height, strong-limbed, broad-chested, straight-backed and of easily upright carriage.

All these details the clerk took in at a glance, while Shenstone was writing in the register.

"I suppose you will want a room all to yourself," he said, admiringly, as he turned the registry book around and read the name recorded.

It was customary at that time, even in very good hotels, to have two or three beds in each room, and to assign two or three gentlemen to occupy them, except in those special cases in which a guest with a fastidious preference for privacy and with money to waste, insisted upon paying double and having an entire room to himself. Shenstone knew the custom and

was not surprised by the clerk's question. For answer he said:

"I should like two large rooms, adjoining and opening into each other. Please have one bed placed in one of them, and fit the other up as a sitting room."

Observing the clerk's perplexity of look, and conjecturing correctly that the hotel had no suites of the kind he wanted, he continued:

"Perhaps you have two parlors on your first floor that you could fit up in that way for my use."

The clerk's first impulse was to suggest that such an arrangement would be rather costly, but lightning-like reflection convinced him that with this guest it would be safer not to volunteer suggestions of economy or of anything else. Philip Shenstone impressed him as a gentleman who knew his own mind and was accustomed to manage his own affairs.

He gave hurried orders, therefore, for the sequestration of two of the public parlors and the conversion of one of them into a bedroom and the other into a sitting room for Mr. Philip Shenstone's use.

When these orders were issued, the clerk turned again to Shenstone, with a note of interrogation in his face, as if he meant to ask what more the gentleman might want. Philip answered the look:

"Sometime to-night — whenever a belated train comes in from the South, a young lady and her attendant — a white woman — will arrive at the hotel. I may be engaged at the time, as some gentlemen are to call upon me, but when these two come — the girl's name is Valorie Page and her companion is Mademoiselle Nathalie — I desire to be informed of the fact, no matter who may be with me. In the meanwhile I want you to reserve for them two of the very pleasantest rooms you have in the house. They will probably remain for a day or two, and I wish them to be made as comfortable as possible."

Declining the suggestion of supper, Shenstone asked to be shown to his rooms, if they were ready, and to have all his baggage sent to them. A negro waiter conducted him up one flight of stairs — the elevator had not been invented at that time — and with a half dollar

in his palm, the servitor took back to the office the request that any one who might call upon Mr. Shenstone during the evening should be shown up to his rooms without announcement, by card or otherwise.

Philip Shenstone's reason for giving this direction lay in a letter that had been placed in his hand when he quitted the Fredericksburg train in Broad street, where the railway came to a frazzled and unannounced end in the open street, without station, platform or any other convenience for the reception or discharge of passengers. He had read the missive hurriedly in the cab. When he sat down in his room he read it again, in the vain hope of making out what it meant. It read:

"My Dear Phil:—I am not at Woodlands, as I hoped to be on your arrival, and I shall not be there for several days to come. Make yourself and your ward as comfortable as you can at the hotel. A friend of mine will call on you and explain.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"BUTLER SHENSTONE."

The letter bore no date, and as it had been delivered by hand, there was no postmark or other indication of whence it had come.

This specially puzzled Phil Shenstone, for reasons. It had been many years since he had seen his uncle, but he very distinctly remembered that gentleman's habits of precision, and especially his almost passionate insistence upon the duty every letter writer owes to his correspondent to indicate where and when each missive is written and whither the reply should be sent. This was one among the many dogmas of gentlemanly conduct which Phil had often in his youth heard his uncle Butler descant upon with almost extravagant emphasis.

An undated letter from Colonel Butler Shenstone seemed therefore so great an anomaly, that Phil would have put it aside as certainly a forgery, if it had been possible to doubt its genuineness. But the old gentleman's handwriting was peculiar in many ways and especially in its print-like legibility — a point upon which Colonel Shenstone insisted as a requirement of morals.

"Nobody has a moral right," he used often to declaim, "to write illegibly. The man who does so is a monster of selfishness. He spares

himself the small pains necessary to make his writing legible, and throws upon his correspondent the burden of deciphering a careless scrawl. I tell you sir, no *gentleman* sends an illegible letter or even one difficult to read, to anybody."

Phil knew Colonel Shenstone's handwriting, and he knew that the puzzling letter he held in his hand was genuine. But what did it mean?

While he was debating that question in his mind there was a knock at his door, and a gentlemen entered. He introduced himself as Major Charles Yerger, and Phil Shenstone at once remembered him as the man who in his own youth had taught him how to shoot with rifle, shotgun and pistol, until his skill, especially in wing-shooting at quails, was the talk of eastern Virginia. That had been a dozen years or so ago, when Phil was a boy.

Major Yerger was as much pleased by the young man's recollection of him as if he had been a school boy and Phil a high trustee of the school. But the Major was there upon important business. After the greetings were

over he suddenly opened the door, with an apologetic wave of the hand to Philip Shenstone, and, discovering a negro waiter standing suspiciously near the entrance, handed the servitor half a dollar and bade him go to the head of the stairs, some distance away, and keep watch there for a man in a white hat with a plume in it.

"I trust you," he said, "to prevent any such man as that approaching Captain Shenstone's door without warning. Watch the stairs, and if you don't let the man pass you there'll be another half dollar for you when I come out of the room. If you let him pass you I'll break your neck and throw you over the balusters."

"Who is the man in the white hat?" Phil asked as Major Yerger closed the door.

"A figment of the imagination," answered the Major. "That negro was listening at the door. He'll stand at the head of the stairs now and look for the white hat. He hungers for that other half dollar, and he dreads the stairs, head foremost.

"Oh, I see," said Phil.

II

MINDFUL of Virginia customs, made familiar to him in his youth, Philip Shenstone asked Major Yerger what he would have to drink.

"Nothing whatever," answered the Major. "I make it a rule to keep a cool head and take no risks when engaged in conducting an affair of this kind. Pardon me, I haven't explained. Your uncle is in trouble, and of course, in hiding. He sent me to tell you about it."

"Do you mean —" began the young man, but changing the form of reply he said:

"Tell me all about it, please."

"Well, it's a miserable business and I and the others have done our best to stop it. There's a fellow out our way named Royal Vance, who has made quite a little reputation for courage by fighting two or three pretty

safe duels and challenging in a number of other cases which were easily arranged."

"A blowhard?" asked Shenstone, sententiously.

"Yes, of course. All aggressive duelists are that. I was one myself once, you know, and I speak with authority. You laugh, but that's true. As I was about to say, your uncle was counsel not long ago in a case against Vance. It was a bad case, involving a good deal of shady behavior on Vance's part. You know how your uncle regards that sort of thing, and how bitter a tongue he has in his head when his sense of honor is affronted. You can imagine the vitriol he put into his speech to the jury. He won his case hands down, but Vance has been pursuing him ever since and at last has found an excuse for challenging him."

"But Colonel Shenstone must be nearly or quite seventy years of age."

"Yes, I know. But he peremptorily forbids us to plead his age or the fact that his vision is so badly impaired that he can hardly tell at twenty paces whether a barn door is

open or shut. He accepted the challenge, and tied our hands completely by his refusal to let us urge the facts. 'I'm young enough to have flayed Vance in a speech,' he said to us, 'and so I'm not too old to give him satisfaction if he wants it.'"

"Who is 'us?'" asked Phil.

"How do you mean?"

"Who is acting with you in his behalf?"

"A young man named Wingfield,— an ex-army officer, who recently inherited a plantation. He's the second. I'm under peace bonds just now, because of another affair, and can't act except as a friend trying to make peace."

"Would Mr. Wingfield mind letting me take his place as second? As my uncle's kinsman —"

"Nothing could be simpler. You were not within reach when the challenge was received. You have since arrived. It is obviously both your right and your duty to become your kinsman's second. I'll arrange that. Fortunately the affair doesn't come off till day after tomorrow morning. Your uncle, you know, has

a number of trust estates in his hands, and in the interests of innocent persons, we claimed for him time in which to transfer his responsibilities. Vance's seconds, who are strangers to me, acted very well in that matter, though Vance himself objected."

"Bloodthirsty, eh?"

"Within the bounds of reasonable safety, yes."

"I think I understand. I always like to understand. I used to be a pilot on the Mississippi, you know, and I always make it a rule to know a stream before I navigate it. In this case I see a straight reach of open river ahead, and I'm ready to take the wheel. Have me made my uncle's chief second; ask Mr. Wingfield to be my adviser, and let me know when and where to meet the persons concerned."

"I suppose it will be pistols at ten paces,—the usual thing?"

"No. Double-barreled shotguns, charged with three chambers of number one buckshot — distance, twenty paces."

"That is unusual."

"The whole thing is unusual. It is very

unusual for a comparatively young man in vigorous health to force a duel upon a gentleman of seventy, who is practically blind. I have it in mind to do something in this case for the discouragement of that sort of dueling. Send me word where and when I am to meet Mr. Vance's representatives. I will await the summons here. I suppose it won't be long?"

"Not before to-morrow morning. There's no hurry, as the meeting is set for the next morning."

With that the Major took his leave, meditating in his mind:

"Wonder what the boy is up to? If he were the principal instead of the second, I shouldn't envy the man standing twenty paces away. Why, I've seen that fellow fill a bag with quails shot on the wing with a rifle. With a shotgun at twenty paces, great Cæsar's ghost wouldn't have a better chance than an egg shell under a trip hammer. But his uncle can't see. Wonder what he's up to anyhow."

III

NO sooner had Major Yerger left the hotel than word came to young Shenstone that the girl, Valorie Page, and her maid, nurse or chaperone — whatever the attendant might be called — had arrived, and had gone to their rooms.

Under ordinary circumstances Phil Shenstone would have had them remain there, and see him later. As he could not know how early in the morning he might be summoned away to meet the seconds of his uncle's adversary, he directed that the creole woman and her charge should be sent to his parlor at once.

He knew Nathalie well. He had had dealings with her. She was even now in his pay. But he had never before seen Valorie Page, and her appearance greatly astonished him.

He had thought of her as a mere child — a little girl. He was astonished to find her a

well grown girl of seventeen or even older, perhaps, disguised in the short frock of a child. She was slender, straight, rather tall, and distinctly handsome, rather than pretty. She carried herself with a dignity which impressed Shenstone as imitative.

"She learned that from the Mother Superior, I imagine," he reflected, "and it is more impressive in a girl of her age than in an older woman. It gives her a marked distinction. But how badly dressed she is! I say, Nathalie, has Miss Page no — well, no more *suitable* clothes than those she is wearing? What is in her trunks?"

"If it please you, sir, she has no trunks. You know she left the convent —"

"Yes, I know,— hurriedly. I quite understand. We must remedy that. We shall remain in this hotel for a day or two. Is your room comfortable, Valorie? Because if it isn't —"

"Very comfortable indeed, Monsieur — Mr. Shenstone, I should say. Indeed comfortable, very."

"All right then. Can you be contented

in this hotel for a day or two, if you have plenty to do? I shall be detained here for a little time, and very busy. Nathalie shall send for dressmakers and you and she can occupy yourselves in the making of some new gowns while I'm busy. I suppose there'll be — well, other things, Nathalie, besides gowns. Bless my soul, I don't know what, but you do, and you're to get them. Have everything you buy sent to the hotel and everything will be paid for at the office. I'll arrange that. Take a carriage when you go shopping and —"

He hesitated a moment, looking with masculine uncertainty at the girl's exceedingly brief skirts and the generally insufficient character of her costume.

"Couldn't you hang a lambrequin or something to the bottom of her skirt and let her go with you? She'd enjoy picking out things, but I must say —"

He hesitated again, fearful of hurting the girl's feelings.

"I have a gown of my own," answered Nathalie, "which I can alter to-night into a sufficient shopping costume for Miss Valorie.

I shall have it quite ready by the morning and we will go together to the shops. How much money shall we spend, Mr. Shenstone?"

"How on earth do I know? That's your business. You are to upholster the girl properly, so that she may be presentable when I take her to Woodlands. I don't know what you ought to pay for lace or bombazine, or how many hats and shoes and corsets and night gowns she ought to have. You do, or you ought to. Fit her out *well.* That's all the instruction I can give you. Now then, Valorie, sit down," for the girl was still standing like a child who had been summoned to the presence of her school principal to answer for some fault. "Sit down and let's get acquainted. Tell me what you had for supper."

"We haven't had any supper," she replied, simply. "The train was late and when we got to the eating house station supper was over."

In that time of primitive railroading no such thing as a dining car had ever been thought of, and the chief purpose of a "refreshment station," was to make the passenger

pay the most that could be extorted from him for the least and the worst food he could be compelled by adverse circumstances to accept.

Shenstone wasted no time in bewailing the hungry plight of the girl or declaiming against travel conditions that no complaint could cure. He rose and pulled the bell cord,— stretching his person over the piano to get at it. Electric bells were not in use at that time, and bell cords were usually hung in the most inaccessible places. When the bell boy appeared Shenstone ordered supper served for three in his rooms immediately. The boy objected that the kitchen and dining room were closed for the night.

"Call a cab then, and inquire at the office where the best restaurant in Richmond is. Be quick."

Then looking again at the long, exposed legs of the girl, he turned to Nathalie and asked:

"Have you any sort of cloak or wrap or mantilla — something long at the bottom you know — which Miss Valorie might wear? We're going to Zetelle's for supper." He

perfectly knew that Zetelle's was the best restaurant in town, and his instruction to the bell boy as to inquiries on that subject, had been prompted only by the fact that the boy had stared at the girl's exposed shanks in an impertinent way. He had felt it necessary either to send the boy out of the room on an errand of business, or else to kick him out with a degree of violence, which might cause disturbance in the corridors. Shenstone remembered that he was occupying parlors on the first floor, and that there were other parlors round about.

At Zetelle's the girl was far less shy than she had been at the hotel, perhaps, because Nathalie's wraps, which she kept closely coiled about her knees, spared her self-consciousness.

To Nathalie she usually spoke in French — after discovering that Shenstone understood that language fairly well. To Shenstone she spoke only in English.

Her English had, now and then, not an accent exactly, but a suggestion of foreignness, chiefly in her choice and arrangement of words. Her French was as perfect as if she had learned it in Paris salons.

She was very weary after her journey, but she bravely rallied under the influence of supper, and before the party had returned to the hotel she had so far taken Shenstone into her confidence as to tell him, in childlike confidence, that she "liked him very, *very* much."

IV

IT was ten o'clock the next morning when Philip Shenstone, with Major Yerger and Captain Wingfield for his supporters, met the seconds of the challenger, Vance. In fact, they met to plan a duel. Ostensibly they met to prevent a duel by securing some amicable adjustment of the "misunderstanding."

All parties were agreed that if possible the duel should give place to an "arrangement," — all parties, that is to say, except Philip Shenstone, and even he favored an "arrangement," if one could be made upon proper terms.

"What is your idea of proper terms?" asked Vance's second.

"That Mr. Vance shall withdraw his challenge, on the ground that the severe words spoken by Colonel Shenstone were spoken in the execution of his duty as counsel in a case at

bar, and that for words so spoken he is not liable to be called to account in any other place. Let me add that we justify also; that we contend that the words spoken by Colonel Shenstone, including the charge that Vance forged or secured some one else to forge the note upon which he sued, are true."

"But, my dear Captain Shenstone," interposed Vance's second, "you must see that no such concession is possible, and that if you insist upon it, the hostile meeting must take place."

"I quite understand that," answered Phil Shenstone. "I mean that the hostile meeting shall take place. Let me explain myself. We are forbidden by Colonel Shenstone to plead his age or his impaired vision or any other disability on his part. But your principal knew of these disabilities from the first, and, coward that he is, he forced this duel upon an old man who cannot see. In the language of a game that I have often observed on the Mississippi river, I have decided to 'call his bluff.' Under the code, if a principal in a duel refuses, or otherwise fails to come to the

scratch, his second is bound to take his place. That obligation of the second carries a privilege with it. There are two well established precedents in the history of Virginia dueling for contending that at any time when he shall think it proper the second may take his principal's place, and that the principal, having placed his honor in the keeping of his second, has no right or privilege of interfering."

"Just what do you mean?"

"I mean that when Mr. Vance and Colonel Shenstone meet to-morrow morning with double-barreled shotguns at twenty paces, I, who can see and who can shoot, intend to take my principal's place, no matter how many objections he may offer. As his second, to whose care he has committed his honor, I claim the right to stand in his stead, so that Virginia may be spared the spectacle of a young man who can see to shoot, killing a half blind old man who can see scarcely at all. That is my plan, gentlemen."

Instantly the representatives of the challenger asked leave to withdraw for consideration and for consultation with their principal.

Phil Shenstone's skill as a wing shot, who fired from the hip without waiting to bring his piece to his shoulder, had not been forgotten in Virginia, and Vance's seconds recognized it as a factor in the situation. When they withdrew, Shenstone lighted a cigar and set about polishing his finger nails while awaiting their return.

An hour later they came back.

"Mr. Vance declines your proposal that you shall take your principal's place," they reported, "on the sufficient ground that he has no cause of quarrel with you."

"Mr. Vance's notion of what constitutes a cause of quarrel seems to me to be peculiarly deficient in clearness. In my remarks to you I have characterized him as a coward who seeks to commit murder under the pretense of honorable personal war. As that assertion of mine seems insufficient to irritate his mind, I beg to add that I now adopt the charge made against him by Colonel Shenstone, and make it my own. I charge him with forgery. If, upon consultation with your principal, you find that some further provocation is necessary, I

suggest that you shall bring him into my presence, and permit me to give him an unmistakable cause of quarrel by slapping his jaws with my gloves or with my open palm, whichever he may think most effective."

He paused and the others stood aghast and bewildered by his resoluteness. After a moment he added:

"Gentlemen, I am very sorry indeed to place you in an embarrassing position, but the fault is your principal's and not mine. When you consented to serve him, as his seconds, I am quite ready to believe, you did not realize that he is a coward, who has sought reputation and safety by forcing a fight upon an elderly gentleman who cannot see to shoot. I am in no way responsible for the situation in which he has placed himself and you. But that situation is this: He must meet me tomorrow morning at sunrise, with double-barreled shotguns, loaded with three chambers of number one buckshot to the barrel, or he must withdraw his challenge to Colonel Shenstone, and leave me to take any further proceedings I may deem proper."

Vance's seconds again withdrew for consultation with their principal. Half an hour later they returned and asked if Colonel Shenstone would withdraw the more offensive words used in his speech.

"No," answered Philip. "Colonel Shenstone has no apologies and no withdrawals to make. What is the use of wasting time, gentlemen? This thing has fined itself down to the question whether or not your principal will meet me, as Colonel Shenstone's second, taking his place, with shotguns at twenty paces, or will withdraw his challenge. There is no other issue, and, as Colonel Shenstone's second I give notice that I will consider no proposal to alter the issue."

Again the seconds withdrew. Presently they returned in a mood of profound disgust and indignation. Vance had allowed himself to be arrested as a man contemplating a duel. As matters then existed in Virginia, that meant that Vance had deliberately secured his own arrest as a convenient way of escaping from the duel he had sought and from which he shrank because of Phil Shenstone's substitu-

tion of himself for his uncle in the character of the man who was to do the shooting. No other explanation was possible. It was not considered "good form" in Virginia, at that time, for the officers of the law to succeed in finding anybody engaged in a duel, so long as he kept himself, even nominally, in hiding.

The gentlemen who had been acting for Vance, fully recognized the situation.

"If you demand a meeting," they said, "of course we hold ourselves bound to take the place of our recalcitrant principal."

"Thank you for the courtesy, gentlemen," answered Shenstone. "I recognize your position and honor your readiness to fulfill a disagreeable duty. But I have no demand to make of you."

"Let me offer you my hand, Captain Shenstone," said the late second of Vance, "and permit me to hope that we shall meet many times hereafter under pleasanter conditions than those which have brought us together upon the present occasion. Of course, we must now present ourselves before a committing magistrate."

"What for?" asked Shenstone.

"Simply to be examined, to decline to answer any questions put to us, and to be discharged. It would be the same if the duel had actually occurred and you had taken a wing shot at — well at the man we have repudiated. You may or may not understand it, Captain, but the law of Virginia with regard to dueling has been carefully framed to forbid duels, but at the same time to render it impossible to punish anybody for doing the thing forbidden. The law makes dueling a crime, but in an excess of virtuous condemnation it holds everybody a criminal who has anything to do with a duel, or who knows anything about it, and doesn't succeed in preventing it. But as every possible witness in such a case is excused from testifying on the ground that his testimony might incriminate himself, of course it is impossible — utterly, hopelessly impossible — to establish the fact that anything like a duel was ever so much as contemplated. But we must go through the forms, you know."

"I see. It reminds me of the old days in

Louisville. There was a Sabbath Day Enforcement League in that city. It demanded an ordinance closing all shops on Sunday. The city government won the favor of the leaguers by passing a very stringent ordinance to that effect, and then pleased the other fellows by utterly neglecting to enforce it. Do you like a good cigar? I think you'll find one of these acceptable."

V

ON returning to his hotel, Phil Shenstone found a note from his uncle awaiting him.

"My Dear Phil," it read. "I cannot at all approve the course you have pursued in this Vance matter. It seems to me to have been at the least impertinent. But as all my advisers assure me that you acted in strict accordance with the code, and warn me that if I enter the smallest objection or in any way criticise your conduct I shall be deemed an outlaw, I can only say that I submit as reluctantly as may be possible under the rules that govern the conduct of honorable gentlemen in such circumstances.

"Now when are you coming to Woodlands with the young lady you have in charge? Or, to speak more accurately, at what time shall I send the Woodlands carriage to the hotel to

fetch you and the young lady? For, of course, she must come to us in the Woodlands carriage. As for you, you are under as much of censure and displeasure on my part as the code permits, but your old familiar room is at your service, and your Aunt Mary has come over to Woodlands for a few days to receive the young lady.

"I am so sorely displeased with you that if you can make yourself and your charge comfortable at the hotel for another twenty-four hours, it will be agreeable to me. I want a little time in which to forgive you. But send me a line to Woodlands by my messenger, who has instructions to await your reply, and I will send the carriage at such time as you shall fix upon."

Philip Shenstone's face broke into a broad smile, as he read the communication.

"We are two gentlemen of Virginia," he reflected. "One of us is old and the other young. We look at things with different eyes. But the young man sees more clearly than the old one does. Still the old gentleman is entitled to his feeling in the matter."

"My dear uncle," he wrote. "Doubtless you are quite right in what you say of my impertinence. But it is the privilege of youth to be impertinent. I remember how it was when you caught me stealing watermelons from your Hawe Branch patch, when I was a boy. You denounced me as an impertinent young poacher, but you called my attention to the fact that all the really ripe watermelons were on the other side of the patch, and in kindly, generous spirit, you went away leaving me free to profit by your instruction.

"Now I want to explain the impertinence that prompted me to interfere as I did with your duel. I hate dueling. I detest it. I regard it as a relic of barbarism. I see clearly that it survives in Virginia simply because a set of cowardly braggarts think to win a maximum of reputation for chivalric courage at a minimum risk of personal safety. They challenge old men or men who are practically blind, and they fight with pistols that couldn't hit anybody if they tried. A dozen years ago, when I was a boy with an inquiring mind, I investigated this thing. I tested a dozen pairs

of dueling pistols, by fixing them in a vise and firing them point-blank. I found, in every single instance that their sights were carefully so adjusted as to miss the man they were aimed at. When I found Vance trying to get a little reputation for courage by fighting a half-blind man like you, I decided that one of two things should happen; either he should back out, or he should receive a charge of buckshot through his diaphragm.

"He chose the wiser and safer course. Virginia is well rid of him, as a swashbuckler. I tell you, uncle mine, it only needs that a few of us shall render dueling dangerous in order to abolish it in Virginia. I shall probably remain here for a time and I shall always stand ready to come back upon summons. But my terms are double-barreled shotguns, loaded with three chambers of number one buckshot to the barrel. I do not anticipate any challenges.

"So much for impertinence. Now for the young girl. I find she is not properly clothed. I have directed her attendant to provide proper garments for her. She tells me that all will be

ready on Thursday morning. If you will order the carriage to be here at that time, Valorie and I will drive out to Woodlands, and, if you receive Valorie tenderly, you shall be free to denounce me and my impertinence in any terms that your eloquence may suggest. But I give you fair warning that the next swashbuckler who tries to force a duel upon you, will have to face me at twenty paces with shotguns, or — well or take the consequences whenever he and I meet. Let us dismiss all this. My ward seems a sensitive creature, and I am anxious that she shall be happy at Woodlands. I hope you will receive her cordially in spite of my inability to explain to you precisely who she is, whence she comes and why. I make myself sponsor for her, absolutely, and without reserve of any sort. She is a young gentlewoman, and must be received as such in the society round about Woodlands, or I shall inquire why, with a corkscrew.

"We shall expect the Woodlands carriage on Thursday morning. But if you or Aunt Mary, or anybody else, have or has the slightest hesitation about receiving Valorie Page as

an honored guest, I beg you to let me know. In that event you and they shall not be troubled. But I do not doubt that I know your chivalry and Aunt Mary's tender affectionateness too well for that. Please tell Aunt Mary, with my love, that I think it very good in her to leave home and go over to Woodlands to receive my ward. I am sure she will feel repaid when she meets Valorie and finds out how dear a child she is. As for you, I look to see you and Valorie sweethearting within forty-eight hours after you meet."

VI

WHEN Valorie presented herself at dinner that afternoon in a new gown — simple, becoming and therefore beautiful — she seemed a different person from the shy girl whom Shenstone had summoned to his presence on the former occasion. She was still shrinkingly modest, but her modesty was dignified and it had no touch of shame in it. She was gowned as a young woman now, and she had no occasion to stoop as she had done before in order to make her dress cover her shanks.

"You'll do," Shenstone thought to himself, "and if that old uncle of mine doesn't fall in love with you, I'll fall in love with you myself."

He paid Nathalie the sum he had agreed to pay her, giving it to her in gold, for the reason that in that barbaric time every state

in the Union had its own wildcat currency, which in other states varied so greatly in its comparative worthlessness, that every merchant had to keep a " Bank Note Detector " always at hand. Only the notes of the Northern Bank of Kentucky and those of the Suffolk banks of Massachusetts passed at par in all the states.

After Nathalie had gone by a very early train, the Woodlands carriage came. It was a vehicle of antique construction, hung so high upon leathern springs that a folding flight of steps was needed on either side for descent to the ground.

The journey to Woodlands was one of many miles. The roads were earthen tracks, smooth now that it was June, and bordered in every part with that luxuriance of vegetation which makes the mere process of living a delight in the Virginian summer time. Here the road ran through woodlands, thickly bordered with flowering shrubs; presently it emerged from the forest glades into a space where wheatfields, whitening to the harvest, gave welcome with their flaunting promise of plenty; then

deflecting a little to the right or left, it passed between fields of lushly luxuriant cornstalks, a dozen feet or so in height, bending under a burden of slowly forming ears, and spreading their sword-like blades so thickly that he who would pass among them on such a morning as this must reconcile himself to a drenching with dew. Here and there were antique rail fences bordering the roadway — fences buried in climbing vines, clematis, blackberry bushes, and the beautiful but noxious creeper known in Virginia as "poison oak," elsewhere as "poison ivy," though it is neither oak nor ivy, — a growth at once as beautiful and as dangerous as the "strange woman" against whom Solomon gave warning to all ages.

Valorie paid small heed to the city streets or the city sights as the carriage was driven away from the hotel, though her companion sought to interest her in them. She was politely impervious to city interests. Had she not seen New Orleans in all the glory of its strange sub-tropical, half-foreign, half-native, and altogether impressive magnificence? What had Richmond to show to eyes like hers,

accustomed to far nobler sights? But when the carriage quitted the city streets and passed on into the glory of the country, she became enthusiastic. She stretched her neck out of one window and then out of the other, and presently she said:

"Oh, I am missing so much of it! If I look at one side of the road the other escapes me. Why isn't it an open carriage?"

Shenstone signaled the driver to stop. Then opening the carriage door and letting down the steps, he beckoned the girl to alight.

"I'll drive," he said to the coachman. "Take your stand on the trunk-plate behind. The young lady will ride by my side on the box."

With that he helped her to climb to the high perch, and himself took the whip and the reins.

Valorie was in ecstasies. She had never seen the country before. She had never before smelled the odors of the woodlands and the fields. She had never traversed a Virginia road in June. She had *never lived,* as she said to her companion, until now. In her eagerness to grasp all of joy that the roadsides

offered, she was half a dozen times in imminent danger of tumbling off the box, and Shenstone found it necessary now and then to pass his arm round her waist by way of restraining her. He did not seem to mind that. Many times he reined in the horses and let her climb down from her high perch to gather particularly alluring clusters of wild flowers. To them, rather than to Shenstone, she talked. They seemed alive to her and to be a part of the glorious June morning. She addressed them as if they had been sentient and responsive. She told them of her joy in the perfect day. She promised them water and tender care at Woodlands. She entreated them to forgive her for plucking them, and to love her as she reminded them that the birds, singing all about, manifestly did.

In brief the girl — half child, half woman, and altogether bewitching — behaved in a fashion that fascinated Phil Shenstone, robbed him of his accustomed reason and left him, as he said in later and soberer moments, "a bewildered idiot."

Sometimes, when the girl had climbed down

from the box and had secured a particularly beautiful bunch of wild flowers, she would dance a little in delight upon the grass by the roadside. Shenstone was old enough and young enough to observe that her dancing was that of one skilled in the art, but still possessed of spontaneity. It was at once the dancing of an accomplished mistress of the art, and the dancing of a free-hearted child.

Phil Shenstone had been uncertain as to the duration of his stay in Virginia — whether it should be for three days or possibly three weeks. During Valorie's second or third dancing exhibition, he decided that it should continue for three months at least. When he announced this determination to Valorie, she opened wide her great blue eyes, and said:

"I don't understand how you can ever think of leaving an enchanted land like this."

Shenstone knew of old the way to Woodlands, and he knew the rigidity of his aunt's insistence upon the proprieties. So when a gate was passed, a mile distant from the house grounds, he halted the carriage, placed himself and Valorie again within it, and gave the

driver what that benighted believer in antique nomenclatures called "eighteen pence"— in other words a quarter of a dollar — by way of hush money as to the wild outside ride.

Then in decorous state the vehicle threaded its way through the pine and hickory forest to the hereditary home of all the Shenstones — Woodlands.

VII

IT was Colonel Shenstone's habit to rise with the earliest dawn, to visit his stables, see his mules fed and curried, ride out to the fields to give orders for the day's plantation work, and then return to the house half an hour or so before the nine o'clock breakfast.

On the second or third morning of Valorie's residence at Woodlands, the old gentleman was astonished to find her waiting for him when he came out of his chamber a little after five o'clock, smoothly shaven and clad in the immaculate suit of white duck, which he always wore in summer when it did not rain.

"I want to see everything, Uncle Butler," she said, explainingly. "I'm going to call you Uncle Butler, if I may. May I?"

The old gentleman, with the gallantry of generations focused in his being, threw his arm about her, drew her lithe form to him,

kissed her on the forehead, and answered:

"You are to call me by any name you please, if only you speak it gently and as if it had an affectionate significance to you. But what the deuce, you little minx, are you doing out of your bed at this unholy hour of the morning?"

"What does 'Little Minx' mean, Uncle Butler? Never mind about explaining it, because your tone tells me it isn't anything very bad. Besides you asked me a question. I'm up at what you call this unholy hour in the morning, because I like to be up. Let me tell you, Uncle Butler,— I was never free in my life till now. I never did as I pleased till now. I was never in the country till two or three days ago, and when the daylight peeped into my windows this morning, I said to myself: 'Get up, you lazy girl, and revel in it all.' That's why I'm here. But I didn't expect to find you in the porch, I only thought I'd get up and go out and smell things that are sweet, and breathe the fresh country air, and maybe, steal a few cherries from the tree I saw from my window."

"Here, boy!" said the Colonel to a passing negro lad. "Are your hands clean? Go and wash them anyhow. Then go to the ox-heart cherry trees behind the house and bring your Miss Valorie a lot of cherries. Those you saw from your window, Little Minx, are morollos, as sour as vinegar, and not worth stealing. Jack will steal some better ones for you. But I'm going to the stables to see the mules fed and curried. So I must leave you."

"May I not go with you?" she asked pleadingly.

"But you'll miss your cherries."

"That's unfortunate," the girl responded, regretfully, "but I like you so much better than the cherries. Besides, maybe, I'd get my feet wet going with you, and I do so want to get my feet wet with the dew. I'll go with you, Uncle."

Colonel Shenstone hailed another passing negro boy and said:

"Stay right here till Jack comes with the cherries I sent him after, and tell him to bring them to the stables, do you hear?"

"But I'se got to help —"

"Never mind what you've got to help. Do as I tell you."

The boy's face clouded. "Ef I don't git out to de milkin' pen 'fore Mammy tackles de crazy cow, Mammy'll lick me fo' sho'."

"Tell her not to. You do what I tell you. Oh, never mind; here comes Jack with the cherries. Hustle to the cowpens and don't get licked."

Jack's notions as to what constituted a proper supply of cherries for a young lady, were based upon his own capacity for consuming that fruit. He brought at least two quarts of the cherries for Valorie's consumption, having himself swallowed at least three quarts during the process of picking them. Ordinarily he was forbidden to invade these trees. He had eaten his share, stones and all, under the fixed negro delusion that cherries can never produce an intestinal disturbance if their seeds be swallowed with them. If he had dared he would have communicated this bit of physiological lore to Valorie, when he saw her rejecting the stones of her cherries. But he had *nous* enough to suspect that his

master would resent the impertinence in some way troublesome to himself. So he philosophically reflected, as he saw the girl eating the fruit and throwing the stones away, "tain't none o' my business ef she gits a colic for her foolishness."

The Colonel ate half a dozen of the cherries — no more. He had taken a cup of coffee — very bad coffee he thought — and it was not his habit to take anything else until the nine o'clock breakfast hour. But somehow, this "little minx" had bewitched him, and he accepted a part of the fruit at her hands. The rest she distributed to the stable boys who instantly decided that "the new little miss is a thoroughbred."

Presently the Colonel was seized with an idea, and he whispered it into Valorie's ear.

"I say, can you ride?" he asked.

"A little," she responded. "I had what they call 'lessons' while I was in the convent. You see it was thought —" she broke off the sentence in consternation.

"Never mind what was thought," answered the Colonel, gallantly. "If you ever sat upon

a horse at all, you can ride a pacing mare of mine. Robert, bring out Zephyr and put a side-saddle on her. Phil is still asleep, the lazy fellow, and you and I, Valorie, are going to have a ride all by ourselves. Zephyr is the best-behaved of mares, and —"

"She's jest a little fractious this mornin'," interposed Robert, the groom. "She's been stabled too long."

"Never mind. We'll manage her. Bring her out and saddle her."

"Yes," interposed the girl, who really knew more of riding than her modesty permitted her to say, and who had in abundant measure that highest quality of the horsewoman, perfect fearlessness,—"Yes, bring her out and I'll ride her. Uncle Butler, I feel as if I could ride a hurricane or an earthquake or a cataclysm — I don't know what that last word means — on so glorious a morning as this."

The Colonel looked at her, and this time he said out loud what he had before said to himself:

"You'll do!"

VIII

FOR the first time in his life Col. Shenstone was late that morning to breakfast. The "little minx" was responsible, though the Colonel gallantly took all the blame upon himself. He had been slow and clumsy, he said, in explaining why he topped and primed tobacco so that each plant should bear eight leaves and no more. He had needlessly wasted time in the cornfields, showing his companion how he grew watermelons there that might be good when those in the uplands patch were too dry and those in the lowlands too wet. He had unpardonably detained her at the gate where Haley was distributing corn to three or four hundred razorback hogs. Really Haley was such a character that he had felt bound to make Valorie acquainted with him. And then he had been obliged to explain to the young lady the process of driv-

ing flocks of turkeys through the tobacco lots, to pick off the grasshoppers. On the whole, the Colonel felt that he was to be excused.

"And what's the difference, Little Minx?" he called out. "The cold ham is here. If the beaten biscuits are cold, we've the consolation of knowing that there's another skilletful in the kitchen. The hot bread is passed, of course, but I see that Phil has so far remembered his manners as to slice and butter the French roll. You and I have issued a new Declaration of Independence. Kizzie, the cook, may fret and fume to her heart's content, but you and I are going to be late to breakfast just as often as we like. So there! Elsie, haven't you any hot cakes?"

A moment later the jolly old gentleman resumed:

"You're a lazybones, Phil," he began. "And you've missed the greatest morning of your life. I tell you —"

"Don't tell me, uncle. I've been up since the dawn, and I've seen all the glory of the morning, though I had no such good company as you enjoyed. That is a pleasure yet to

come, unless you and Valorie have conspired to shut me out of early morning rides with her. I believe you quite capable of that."

"Put it a little differently, Phil, and I'll agree with you. If you don't show yourself in time to ride with my Little Minx, why I'll ride with her myself, and you may as well understand it. But tell me, where have you been?"

"Visiting my plantation. You see, Valorie, an old lady has subjected me to a sore embarrassment. That and you are the sole reasons for my being in Virginia at this time. Aunt Patty Rooker, my father's great aunt, you understand, died a little while ago and willed to me her plantation and negroes. Her plantation consists of about three hundred acres of utterly worn out land, mostly grown up in old field pines, and her negroes comprise four families, seventeen persons in all, only one of whom is fit to do a day's work. I've been over there this morning to see Niah, the one able-bodied man in the lot. I tried to make an arrangement with him. I offered to let him have the plantation rent free so

long as he should live, if he would undertake to make it yield a living for the seventeen of them. Being a person of some shrewdness, Niah declined the proposal. Then I made another offer. I happen to own some wild land in Indiana — good, fertile land, but utterly useless to me. There are six hundred and forty acres of it. I offered to give it free to the crew of seventeen, with transportation thrown in, if they would emigrate. But, of course, they would do nothing of the sort. I said I would stock their little farms, give them a mule apiece, and a cow, but they shook their heads. They had attachments to their old home; they didn't know how they might get on among 'a lot o' Yankees.' In brief, the thing was a failure altogether. I'm saddled with a wholly worthless plantation and the care of seventeen negroes, only one of whom is able to do a real day's work."

"But what are you going to do, Mr. Shenstone? — I don't like to call you that, it seems so — well, so far away, and you have been so kind to me. Mayn't I call you —"

"Call me Phil," answered Shenstone.

"That's friendly and fellowshippy, and that's what Uncle calls me. Just call me Phil."

"But — well, suppose I say 'Mister' first. I'll call you Mr. Phil, and you shall call me Val. That's what my father called me in the long ago, when I was permitted to know him, before he became bad."

"He was never bad, Val. The people who told you that were liars. I knew your father for many years and he was never bad."

The girl quivered with emotion.

"Then they wronged him?" she said, adding: "I always felt that they did. Dear father! He used to tell me stories, and I loved him so much that I couldn't learn to hate him when they told me I must."

"Whoever told you aught of evil of your father," said Shenstone, with impressive earnestness, "was a liar and the truth was not in him. Believe me. I knew him. I know his whole story as you do not, and it is as well that you never shall. I tell you now, and I shall tell you always, to believe in your father, in his integrity, in his righteousness and in his devoted love for you. Cherish his memory if

you desire to cherish anything of the past. Whatever else you do, or think, or believe, or suspect, never for one moment suffer yourself to lose your abiding faith in the memory, the integrity, the great, overpowering goodness of your father."

"Will you tell me about him, sometime?" the girl asked eagerly, passionately.

"Sometime, perhaps. Not now. We have much else to talk about now; but sometime I will tell you about your father. But you asked me a question. What am I going to do about the black people on the worthless little plantation which my great aunt has willed to me? Beyond the present I do not know. For the present I'm going to ask Uncle Butler for the address of his commission merchants in Richmond, and I am going to write to them for some Cincinnati bacon, some western flour and two or three barrels of roe herrings with which to feed them. My dear Val, you can't imagine their helplessness. There isn't one of them who couldn't do good service in a garden, and the garden over there is the one fertile spot on the

little plantation. It has had the benefit of all the fertilizers produced on the place for three generations past, and there is nobody for it to feed except the seventeen negroes of whom I have become the embarrassed and unhappy owner. Yet it has never occurred to them, in my absence, to plant the garden. It is June now, and last year's weeds are still undisturbed. Not a bed has been spaded. Not a seed has been put into the ground. I've ordered the whole force — perhaps I should call it the whole feebleness — to set to work making beds to-day and after breakfast I'm going over to superintend the work. Will you ride over with me?"

"Why, yes, of course, if my lessons are over in time."

"Your lessons?"

"Yes. In Virginia housekeeping. You see Aunt Mary has left her own home to come over here and keep house for Uncle Butler till I learn how, and it isn't even a little bit fair to keep her longer than necessary. She wants to go back to her own home and be quiet and happy there. She's going to teach me the

ways of plantation housekeeping, and then I'm going to do it for Uncle Butler. You see I know all about scrubbing and sweeping and bed-making and cookery,— I learned that in the convent — but I don't know how to issue rations to the field hands, or — well a lot of little things, and Aunt Mary is going to teach me. When I learn, she is going back home and I am going to be Uncle Butler's housekeeper. You know, Mr. Phil, that his house has been horribly kept, for years. Until Aunt Mary came over to receive me, there hadn't been a bed aired for months and years. The floors have been polished right over the dirt till they are black where they ought to be white. There are sixteen negro women who are supposed to be housemaids in this establishment, and you don't know what fun I'm going to have as soon as I come into control, by making them work for the luxurious living they get. I'm going to have every floor scrubbed to its uttermost corners. I'm going to have every bed pulled to pieces and taken out of doors to be cleaned and aired. I'm going to have every piece of furniture gone over

thoroughly, every curtain taken down and dusted. Oh, I'm hungry for the fray and it will be a great frolic. I must first be mistress and in order to be that I must learn how to 'give out' and all the rest of it, but that oughtn't to take long for a girl of common sense, do you think? Anyhow our housekeeping work belongs to the morning, so I can ride over to your plantation with you in the afternoon. How far is it?"

"About three miles. I wish the road out were no longer."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, we can ride the three miles in less than half an hour. I wish I might dispose of the whole thing in ten times as long a period."

"But why can't you? Why can't you just give up the inheritance?"

"That sounds easy, Val; but think of it. My dear old great aunt owned this little place and the negroes on it. She had a double purpose in willing both to me. She had a desire that I should come back to Virginia and become a planter,— for she didn't have much respect for any other land or any other peo-

ple,— and she had a tenderly sentimental desire that the negroes who had been her servants all their lives should have a good master. If I refuse the inheritance the negroes must be sent to the auction block and sold off south for whatever they will bring, by way of paying off the debt of three thousand dollars that encumbers the estate. You see how it is. I must accept the bequest. I must pay off the debt, and I must see to it that the negroes have enough to eat as long as they live, in spite of the fact that they do not earn it. So far as the financial part of the matter is concerned, I am fortunately able to take care of it. I own a controlling interest in a good many big steamboats and a good many little ones that are doing a profitable business in various parts of the western waters.

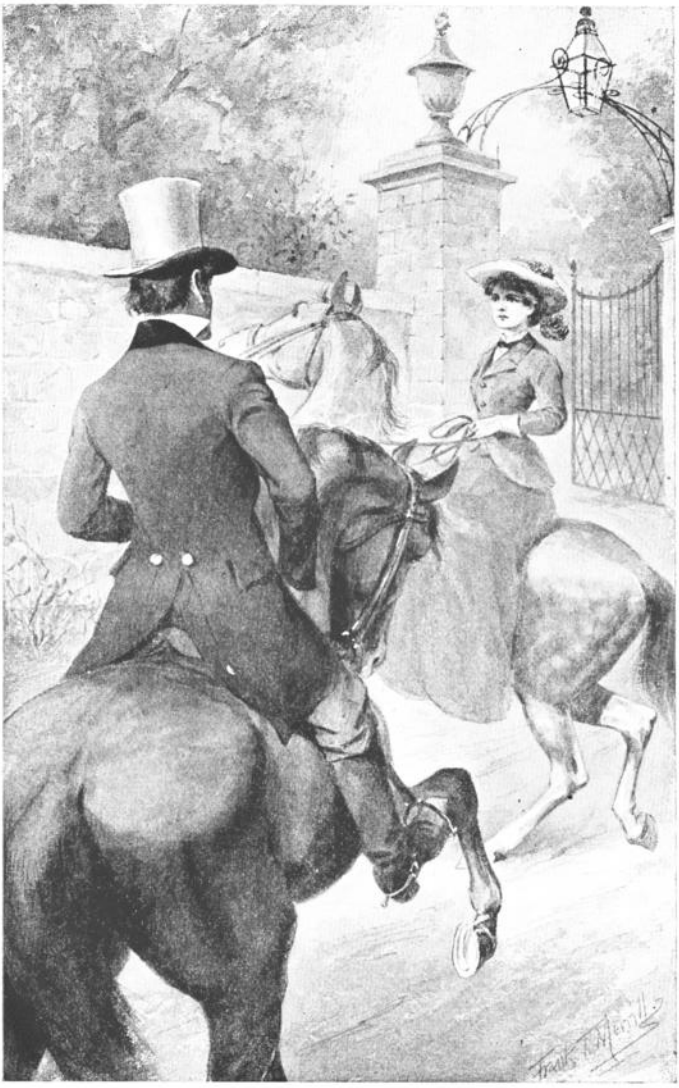
"The thing that bothers me is not that. These negroes are blindly conservative. They were born here as the chattels of a land owner. All their lives they have been taught that they must look to the land for their support. When the land can't support them its owner must, and I am unfortunately the owner. They

claim the right to live upon the land on which they were born, and I confess that I feel bound to recognize that right. It would be cheaper for me to board them all in good hotels in Richmond, but they do not wish to go to Richmond. My only course is to maintain them where they are, and to devise such means as I can to make their own labor contribute something to their support."

The girl sat silent for a time. Then she went away to join Aunt Mary in the morning's work of "giving out." It was not until she and Phil Shenstone mounted their horses after "snack," that she returned to the subject. As they neared an outer gate she suddenly turned her mare about and faced her escort with sad, half-teary eyes.

"You have many burdens that do not belong to you. Am I one of them? Am I also a tax upon your generosity, a person for whom you are called upon to provide because she is unable to earn her own living? Because if I am that, I —"

"You are nothing of the kind, Val," he answered with the utmost tenderness; "and



She suddenly turned her mare about and faced her escort. — *Page 60.*

if you were, I should rejoice in the privilege of caring for you. Let me tell you. Your father was a man considerably older than I am, but he was the best friend I ever had on earth, and when he lay dying his one concern, the only thing he thought about, was your welfare. He asked me with his dying breath to care for you, and he told me what dangers beset you. I gladly promised him and I would fulfill that promise if it cost me my life. In fact it costs me exactly nothing. Your father placed in my hands a sufficient sum of money to cover all and more than all, the expense you can ever be to me. I don't like to talk of that. It is too painful, but you must know that you are a burden to nobody, financially."

The two rode on in silence for a time after the girl had said a simple, "Thank you!"

After a while she asked: "Are you free to tell me why I am posing under an assumed name?"

"You are not," he answered. "Your father's name was Page. You were called Lee in the convent because other people, people who wanted to hide you, chose to call you

so. They were bad people and their purpose was evil. Be satisfied with knowing that as Valorie Page, you bear an honorable name your father bequeathed to you."

"Will you some day tell me about my father?" she asked again, as tears slipped out between her eyelids and fell upon her cheeks.

"Yes, some day. Not now. Your father was a hero."

"You say that?"

"Yes, Val. I say it."

"Thank you, Mr. Phil."

IX

WHEN Phil Shenstone and Valorie returned to Woodlands, they found the drive filled with carriages, the horse racks occupied with hitchings, and the great flower-bordered porch peopled with men and women, who had come to call upon the new arrivals. Phil Shenstone knew the open-minded way in which every Virginian regarded his own and other people's affairs, and foreseeing that awkward questions would be quite innocently asked of Valorie, he hurriedly said to her, as they approached the porch:

"Take my arm and keep it. Stick close to me. I'll do the talking."

The caution came none too soon, for the first of the Virginia dames to whom the girl was presented, bristled with questions which she had no thought of making impertinent. Her only purpose was the friendly one of

opening a way for the girl to connect herself with distinguished families in Virginia. The gentlewoman did not dream that there might be distinguished families in other parts of the world, lying outside Virginia.

"Welcome, you dear girl!" the dame began. "You are a Page and as such — but are you of the Carter-Page family of the Shenandoah Valley — the Cookes and Powells and the rest, or of the lower James River Pages?"

Phil Shenstone replied:

"All the Virginia Pages are akin, you know. Miss Valorie Page has been educated at so great a distance that she is hardly yet a mistress of our state geography or of her varying kinships. Permit me to say she is worthy of them all."

By that time half a dozen others were pressing forward, and so, as Phil Shenstone, in his pilot-slang, reflected: "That riffle is passed."

In the same adroit way he fenced off all other questioners. The Virginians of that time abhorred nothing so much as gossip-mongering, and they held in special detestation the "Yankee habit" of asking personal

questions. Yet there never were people who could ask so many personal questions as they. They did it in no spirit of impertinent curiosity, but merely to give the guest an opportunity to "orient" himself, as the French say. They assumed, in every case, that the guest was a person of some consequence, if only he had an opportunity to explain, and so, with utterly kindly purpose, they asked those questions which would give him the opportunity he was supposed to covet.

Phil Shenstone had been a pilot, accustomed to navigate complexly difficult waters, and he adroitly managed to steer Valorie through the shoals and quicksands of her first social questioning.

Colonel Shenstone lent mighty aid. It was only June and watermelons were not due to be ripe until July, but Colonel Shenstone had always been a lover of good things to eat, and he had always labored to have them early. It was his habit, therefore, to plant his earliest watermelons under glass and in a warm soil. It was his glory upon this occasion to have his servants surprise the company by walking

into the porch with a dozen great, fat watermelons upon their shoulders, ripe a full month before anybody else thought of having such fruit in readiness for eating.

This was a diversion and Phil welcomed it. The talk thereafter was not of James River or Shenandoah Valley Pages, but of Colonel Shenstone's remarkable success in gardening for early results. It was admiringly reported that he had served tomatoes on the tenth of June, though the Fourth of July was accounted early; that he had sent cucumbers to his friends as early as the middle of May, and above all that he had distributed pecks of new peas to the plantations round about, on the twenty-fifth of April.

All these were matters of far greater consequence than the relationships of the young gentlewoman who had come to dwell at Woodlands, the more especially because the interest of the visiting gentlewomen in those relationships was purely polite and perfunctory.

But to Valorie the matter presented itself in a more alarming aspect. She knew so little

about herself that she dreaded a renewal of the questioning and she foresaw that renewal as inevitable. For, a week or two after this, Colonel Shenstone announced that he had invited guests to dinner on the following Thursday, by way of welcome to Phil and Valorie, "and," he added, "to serve as Valorie's formal bringing out. My sister Mary is homesick for her honeysuckles and four o'clocks and pretty-by-nights, and she declares that Valorie is fully competent to run the household. So Mary is going home to-morrow, and my Little Minx is to preside at the dining day."

"I've been studying your big dictionary, Uncle Butler," said Valorie, shaking a finger at him.

"And what did you learn there?"

"That 'minx' means 'a saucy girl,' and so whenever you call me "Little Minx,' it's the same as calling me 'you saucy little girl.'"

"Well, I didn't make the dictionary, did I? Some Yankee did that, who didn't know that I mean just the opposite of what he says I mean. I wonder why I bought that dictionary anyhow. Oh, I know. When Phil was

a boy here at Woodlands he complained that he hadn't any dictionary except his Latin one and his Greek one and his classical one and the old Johnson-Walker that spelled the words wrong. So I bought this to appease his abnormal craving for information. You see he was ambitious in those days and meant to make a scholar of himself. You didn't do that after all, did you Phil?"

"No. But I may do it yet," he answered with a note of melancholy in his tone; "or at any rate I may decide to do what I can by way of repairing deficiencies. I don't know, I haven't yet made up my mind. But about the dining day; you needn't have any fear, Val. You'll be too busy with your duties as hostess for them to question you much, and if anybody asks you a question that you don't know how to answer, you can suddenly discover that somebody else needs attention at the moment, and before you've done with that the question will have been forgotten. If worse comes to worst, just say you don't know, that you were educated in a convent in the far South and

were never taught concerning matters of personal history."

"No subterfuges will be necessary," broke in Colonel Shenstone, removing his long, reed-stemmed, Powhatan pipe from his mouth for a moment. "I shall announce on that occasion that Valorie Page is *my adopted daughter,* the destined inheritor of Woodlands, and I don't imagine anybody will think it necessary or prudent to inquire further than that. There are ultimates in our Virginia society, and I have a strong conviction that the endorsement of Butler Shenstone is one of those ultimates. Anyhow, Little Minx — confound the dictionary! — you need have no uneasiness. My ears are quick, even if I don't see very well, and if anybody asks you troublesome questions, I'll create a diversion as we military men used to say."

"But, Uncle Butler —" began the girl in fresh alarm.

"*But,* Little Minx, you needn't finish your sentence. I know what you would say. Let me assure you that my regard for truth is as

great as your own. So when I tell everybody, as I shall, that you are my adopted daughter and the heir to Woodlands, I shall speak the exact truth. I've decided to cut Phil off with a shilling, which in Virginia means sixteen and two thirds cents, because he has enough without Woodlands, and because he has been growling for weeks past over the fact that an affectionate relative has made him heir to a plantation and negroes. He shall never have that cause of complaint against me after I'm gone."

"Thank you, Uncle," said Phil. "I heartily agree with your plans, and I've already decided what I'm going to do with that shilling. I certainly don't want Woodlands on my shoulders. Give it to Val, by all means."

"I have made up my mind to that," said the old man. "If I find I can legally adopt her, after a talk with you, Phil, I'll do that. If I can't, I'll make a new will, giving Woodlands to her. Anyhow, Little Minx, you've made a nest for yourself in my old man's heart, and you are henceforth my daughter."

As he said this he stepped over the portal

as if about to enter the house, but turning said:

"It used to be that a cup of properly made coffee was ready for me when I shaved in the morning before going out; it used to be that a cheery smile greeted me at the breakfast table: it used to be that some one I cared for, some one I loved, liked to go with me to the stables and get her feet wet with dew. Many loving things used to be. But that was years and years ago — until within these last few weeks, since Little Minx became mine. Now it has all come back."

He moved as if to pass on into the hall way but Valorie alertly confronted him and held up her face saying:

"Uncle, I'm glad if I have made you more comfortable — no, that isn't what I mean or what you mean. I'm glad if I've brought a little love and sunshine into your lonely life. But as to the rest of it, *don't!* Give Woodlands to Mr. Phil, please.'

"Now you're making yourself a little minx in the dictionary sense," he said, tenderly caressing her; "and I won't have that. You

may love me all you like, but you mustn't interfere with such business arrangements as I choose to make. I like to think of you as my Little Minx, in my sense of the words, but not in the dictionary sense. I wish I had burned that dictionary long ago."

"Never mind that, Uncle Butler. I'll be your Little Minx in your sense, and I'll do all I can, as long as I live, to bring love and tenderness into your life."

She broke into tears and fled to the inner precincts. The old man,— long widowed and bravely enduring the loss of love that had fallen upon him years ago when the wife of his youth was taken away while he was yet young, — shed some drops on his own account, which he angrily brushed away as he placed "eighteen pence" into the hand of Jim, the head dining room servant, saying:

"Jim, the fishing's good, now that the dogwood is in blossom. Maybe your Miss Valorie can spare you for a day off presently. Here's a quarter. Buy some fish lines."

X

VALORIE was much troubled by the things suggested in the unfinished conversation — most conversations are unfinished — between herself, Colonel Shenstone and Phil. She felt herself an intruder, and she was bent upon securing some revision of the decisions arrived at by those who had her fortunes and her life in charge. But she had heavy burdens of domestic responsibility upon her, so that for some days afterwards there was no leisure in which to seek a renewal of the conference. Aunt Mary had gone home and the conduct of the household rested upon the young girl's shoulders. First of all there was Colonel Shenstone's early morning cup of coffee to prepare with her own hands in order that its aroma might be altogether right, and, more important still, as her quick feminine perceptions taught her, there

was the duty of drinking it with him every morning, without hurry and in a spirit of affectionate comradery.

Then she had the task of renovating the long-neglected house and repairing the consequences of the negro neglect of years. This was the more difficult for the reason that she was determined to have it done only at such times and in such ways as should in no wise disturb Colonel Shenstone in the routine of his life, but she adroitly managed that. Fortunately the long-neglected house servants made no resistance, active or passive, to her exercise of authority. They were quick to understand that she enjoyed both the confidence and the affection of their master, and they knew that any hesitation or reluctance in obedience to her orders, if the fact should come to his knowledge, would be the full equivalent of open defiance of him. Not one of them knew from experience what dire consequences would follow defiance of him, for that was an extreme of mutiny upon which nobody had ever dared venture; but whatever curiosity they may have felt upon that subject

was content to satisfy itself with conjecture and without experiment. Moreover the girl had a certain comradely way with her, which quickly won the servants to a willing obedience. However exigent she might be as to thoroughness of work, she never gave her orders harshly, or with the smallest suggestion that she anticipated disobedience even as a possibility. From the first the servitors liked and admired her, and very soon, in their simple-minded way, they began to love her and to do her will more than willingly. Where they failed by reason of unskilfulness, she set to work to teach them skill and, in their homely way they commented upon the fact: "'Stid o' scoldin' she shows us," they said. Where they failed through habitual negligence, she laughed at them until, joining in the laugh, they bestirred themselves to betterment. Where their carelessness was due simply to a lack of understanding, she preached to them, in her pleasant way, a new gospel of cleanliness and thoroughness and neatness, and she succeeded in converting them.

A very few of the younger ones learned un-

willingly, and upon these she brought authority to bear. She selected the most recalcitrant one to serve as an example. To her one day, in the presence of all the rest, she said:

"Sally, you don't seem to like your work in the house. Perhaps you'd like me to ask your master to release you from it and send you to the fields."

There was no threat made — only a suggestion of preference — but Sally understood. Between field negroes and house servants there was a great gulf fixed. The house servants constituted an aristocracy as definite and as well recognized as that of a group of duchesses and marchionesses is to the wives of English tradespeople. To fall from the position of housemaid or chambermaid or lady's maid on a great plantation to that of a helper in the fields, was the full equivalent of the lapse of a countess to the counter of a shop.

Colonel Shenstone happened to overhear this passage between Valorie and Sally, and for comment he said:

"She'll do!"

When the dining day came, Valorie had

everything in readiness for it, and Colonel Shenstone, whose dignity was that of a long range gun, was on guard. To such of the guests as had already met Valorie he said:

"I think you already know my daughter," and he said it with an emphasis upon the last two words that was easily understood. To those who were new acquaintances of hers he was at pains to say:

"Let me introduce you to my daughter, Miss Valorie Page, who is mistress of Woodlands, and your hostess."

When at dinner a young gentleman — embarrassed perhaps because another young gentleman sat next his sweetheart — bungled a little in the carving of a fowl, to the detriment of the table linen, he asked pardon of Colonel Shenstone. The gallant old gentleman was prompt to reply:

"My daughter, Miss Valorie Page, will excuse you, I am sure. I have found her very indulgent to our masculine mistakes. Valorie, Mr. Meade asks your forgiveness for a slight mishap."

"No apology is needed, I am sure," said

Valorie, graciously. "I only wonder at the skill the young gentlemen of Virginia show in carving. Mr. Meade, you may help me to a bit of the breast if you please."

"She'll do," said Colonel Shenstone under his breath, but audibly enough for Phil to hear and rejoice in the verdict.

When, at the end of the dessert, the sherry was brought on and all glasses filled, Colonel Shenstone, instead of proposing the usual toast of dismissal to "The ladies," rose in his place and said: "My friends, I ask you to drink standing, a glass of wine in welcome to the new mistress of Woodlands, my daughter, Miss Valorie Page."

Then with stately courtesy he advanced to the door, bowing, and held it open while the gentlewomen passed through. One of them, Edna Spottswood, who had evidently overheard the old gentleman's comment upon Valorie, leaned toward him as she passed and said in his ear:

"You'll do, Colonel Shenstone."

Edna was one of the three or four young women who, after the old Virginia custom,

remained for a few days as guests at Woodlands, and that night, when she and some others were having their hair combed by the maids, she suddenly ejaculated, apropos of nothing in particular:

"Why don't the young gentlemen form themselves upon the model of Colonel Shenstone and men like him?"

"He is very gallant," answered another.

"That isn't what I mean," said Edna. "It is more than mere gallantry, more than manners. He is always so thoughtful, so kindly, so considerate of others, so delicately sensitive to every need that any one may feel — pshaw! I can't say it."

"I can," said Valorie, "he's a *gentleman.*"

"That's it!" said the rest in chorus.

XI

AS the weeks went on, Phil Shenstone manifested none of the impatience he had at first felt to get back to his business in the West. There were several reasons for this. The fascination of the old Virginia life, in which his boyhood had been passed had taken a strong hold upon him again for one thing. Its utter restfulness was soothing to his spirits after an arduous career of constant and strenuous endeavor. For another, he still had on his hands the unsolved problem of how best to care for the seventeen negroes who had been left to him as an inheritance, and who were helpless under existing conditions, to make a living for themselves. They had a garden growing now, and that would help to feed them, but the help was a small one, and but for his daily superintendence even the garden would have come to naught.

Then again he had begun reading the fine old English literature on the shelves of the Woodlands library; his old scholarly instincts had strongly revived in him, so much so indeed, that after reading Pope's Homer and Dryden's Virgil again, he had got down his Greek and Latin dictionaries, and, with the aid of some old grammars of those languages, had fallen into the habit of lying on the greensward under the trees in the Woodlands' house grounds, and trying to dig out translations of his own for the great masterpieces of classic literature. To his gratified astonishment his Latin and Greek not only came back to him, but came back with a quickness and fulness of perception which had never been his in his student days. His matured mind easily grasped things which his unformed student mind had not grasped at all, and he was strongly tempted to undertake again, and with greater interest, the tasks of education and culture which circumstances had compelled him to drop nearly a decade before.

Finally, there was Valorie. When by his command she had been put into skirts suitably

long for her age, she had seemed suddenly to change from an awkward child into a graceful young woman, and since she had assumed the dignity and responsibility of mistress at Woodlands, her ripening into a self-possessed young womanhood had been almost astonishingly rapid. It had brought with it no particle of loss of that simplicity and childlike honesty of character which had seemed to him so charming on his first acquaintance with her, but it had added the charms of dignity and a self-possession altogether pleasing. As a school girl, dependent upon unknown persons for her very bread and butter, and subject in every hour and minute of her life to the arbitrary control of those in authority over her, her manner had been marked by the timid, shrinking, half-cowardly self-consciousness of a child who has no rights and is uncertain of her privileges. As the Mistress of Woodlands, assured of her personal independence, honored with Colonel Shenstone's affection, and exercising the functions of a hostess whose hospitality was sought on every hand, she had rapidly ripened into a

young woman, very young still but very dignified and old enough to hold her own.

Without quite admitting it, and perhaps half unconsciously, Phil Shenstone had come to feel that his interest in Valorie was an additional inducement for him to prolong his stay in Virginia. He was directing her reading for one thing. He was riding with her a good deal, for another, and for still another, Edna Spottswood had become deeply interested in Valorie, and Phil liked to visit Edna, and talk with her regarding his ward.

Finally, Phil rejoiced in good music, and Valorie knew how to produce such. Early in her life at Woodlands she went to the long-disused piano and began to play, while Colonel Shenstone stood by to listen and to turn the music for her. After a few bars she suddenly broke off and asked:

"Uncle Butler, is there a monkey wrench on the plantation?"

"Yes, Little Minx," he answered, "a dozen of them. But what use have you for a monkey wrench?"

"I want to tune the piano. It is horribly out of tune."

"But can you tune it? Where did you learn that art?"

"In the convent. The music master taught all of us to do it. He said truly that nobody was a musician till she could tune her instrument without a tuning fork. You see, Uncle Butler, you must be able to recognize a note — A for instance — by your own ear and without a guide, before you are really fit to play for company. That is why he wouldn't let most of the girls play for company at all. He said bad playing was greatly worse than no playing. Indeed he used to shock the Sisters by swearing dreadfully about it. So I had to learn to tune all the instruments I played — the piano, the harp, the —"

"Do you play the harp?"

"Yes, of course. It's so simple you know. But I play pretty much everything. They educated me for — well, that way."

"So," said the old man meditatively. "And here you've been thinking of playing on an old piano that has been practically unused

for twenty years or more. I'll not let you have a monkey wrench, Little Minx."

With that he quitted the parlor, and Valorie wondered what she had done to offend him. A few days later there came to Woodlands a grand piano of celebrated make, a harp and a great goods box full of sheet music.

It was Colonel Shenstone's way to order things wholesale.

There were still other reasons why Phil Shenstone should indulge his desire to remain in Virginia for a time, as he explained to Valorie during one of their horseback rides together. Something he said to her in the course of their talk on that occasion, or some quite innocent and unimpertinent question from the young woman, betrayed him into an autobiographical mood, and he told her the story of himself.

"My father was Uncle Butler's brother, you know," he said, "though he was many years younger. When my grandfather died Woodlands plantation was divided between the two, and when my father married he built a new house on his half of it. You've seen

the blackened foundations of it over by the old water mill, for it was burned many years ago. I was born there and lived there until I was thirteen or fourteen years old, though both by night and by day, after I ceased to be a baby, I was as often at Woodlands house as at the new place.

"My father was a man of high culture and was the best teacher I ever had; but he was utterly unfit for the care of his own estate, partly because of his studious habits, but more because of his too great generosity and his excessive confidence in the integrity of his fellow-men. He was always ready — much too ready indeed — to help anyone needing his help. I do not know the details, but I know that when I was in my fourteenth year, my father found his fortune gone and himself in danger of falling into insolvency. He decided to go to Indiana, where he had a considerable undeveloped landed property. Uncle Butler of course stood ready to help him in every way. He took up the mortgages on my father's plantation, paid off most of the debts and himself assumed the rest. In return my

father transferred his land and negroes to his brother, and Woodlands became again a single great plantation, with a single owner and master. I know now, though I knew nothing about it then, that Uncle Butler's payments on my father's account amounted to more than my father's share of the property was worth.

"We went West, and my father died there within a few months. Uncle Butler begged my mother to come and live at Woodlands, telling her that as I was to be his heir and the next owner of the estate, her maintenance would be merely an anticipation of so much of my inheritance, and that she would really be beholden to nobody but me.

"My mother was a sensitively proud woman, and while she would not have been ashamed, with such an understanding, to accept Uncle Butler's hospitality, she felt that she could not as a dependent, face the people round about, among whom she had always been a person of consequence.

"Refusing the offer, therefore, she took a school and for a year or two made a meagre living out of it. Then she married again.

"Her second husband had three daughters of his own by a former marriage, and they all came to live with us. He was a man of large ability, but of a domineering temper. He developed the unimproved lands which my father had left to my mother and soon made them profitable. I had no share in all this as the lands had been willed to my mother, but my stepfather, who was not an ungenerous man in his way, so far recognized a moral claim upon my part, that he sent me to Asbury University at Greencastle. I had already, during my mother's widowhood, gone through an excellent school, and although I was not yet sixteen years old, I was fully prepared to enter college.

"I remained a student there for two years, passing my vacations with my mother at our home in a little Ohio river city. At these times I discovered that my mother was very unhappy, and after awhile I discovered the cause; my stepsisters were annoying her in every way they could, humiliating her, and even openly insulting her when my stepfather

was away from home, as he was, most of the time, because of his business.

"I could not fight girls, of course, but on my stepfather's return one day, I laid a complaint of them before him and, perhaps in a less respectful tone than I ought to have used, *demanded* that he should protect my mother. He flew into a passion and we had a quarrel. In the course of it he said to me: 'If you say another word, I'll use the rod upon you.' I looked him in the eyes and answered: 'If you attempt to do that I will kill you,' and he saw that I meant what I had said.

"He left the room without another word, and went to my mother, who was an invalid. After they had been in conference for an hour he went away and my mother sent for me. She told me that my stepfather had decided to withdraw me from college and set me to work. I suggested that while he might refuse to maintain me in college he was not my master, and that I would choose my own work. Then she told me something I had never known before. He had had himself appointed my

guardian, so that until I should reach the age of twenty-one his authority over me would be as absolute as if he had been my father. I answered:

"'Advise him not to attempt to exercise his authority. It will be best for him and for all concerned.'

"Then I tenderly caressed my mother and left the room. I had my father's watch — mine now — which had cost him many hundreds of dollars in England, and was worth many hundreds still. I went at once to a jeweler, who knew that notable repeater's value, and offered it to him for a hundred dollars. He had been my father's friend, and he was a man of generous mind. He replied that he would not rob me by taking the watch at the price mentioned. He would give me two hundred, and, he added: 'It is worth greatly more than that, but it isn't an easy thing to sell. I'll hold it a year for you. If within that time you wish to pay me back the money with ten per cent. interest, you shall have the heirloom.'"

"That's the watch you are carrying now?" half asked and half declared the girl.

"Yes. I redeemed it. Never mind about that now. I went back to the house and packed my small belongings. That evening I boarded the steamer General Pike, bound from Cincinnati to New Orleans.

"The first clerk on board of her was an old schoolmate of my own. He had no salaried place open to me, but he made me what they call 'mud clerk,' which, in return for much hard work, gave me my passage and my board, together with a chance to do better after a while. I soon saw some small chances, I learned that the deck passengers, of whom there were multitudes in those days, must feed themselves, and that in their improvidence most of them brought utterly inadequate supplies for their voyage. I purchased considerable food stuff at Louisville, and when the deck passengers began to run short, I fed them at a profit so large that when we reached New Orleans my capital was increased by fifty per cent. On the way up the river I bought

small lots of sugar and molasses at the landings, the products of the smaller plantations whose owners preferred a cash sale to the shipment of their very small lots. By the time that two or three trips had been made, I had added several hundred dollars to my funds, and I began to look about me for a chance of betterment. I didn't want to remain either a clerk or a speculator. One day in New Orleans I met Norman Page, your father. He was a dandy pilot, on the dandiest steamboat of that time, which, with him at the wheel, had broken all records for speed. He was a Virginian and so was I, and we speedily became friends. He took me as his 'cub'— that is to say, his pupil — and taught me the river. By the time I had learned it thoroughly — for he would tolerate nothing short of perfection in me — I had attained the age required by law, and I secured my license. Then he took me for his partner, and I too became a dandy pilot, always perfectly dressed, always a man of leisure, when in port, and always, under the law, an autocrat when on board. For you know the pilot is by law

made sole judge of what and when and how much a boat may do in navigation. If he decides that it is unsafe to run and ties the boat up to the bank, even the captain cannot overrule him. His judgment is final; his authority is absolute.

"About the time when I became a cub pilot my mother died. It was a fortnight after the funeral when the news reached me in a letter from an old schoolmate, for my stepfather had not notified me. About the same time came a letter from Uncle Butler urging me to come to him and complete my education at his expense, but, feeling that he had already sacrificed much to my father, I declined to add to the obligation, and continued my endeavors to make my own way in the world.

"After I became a full-fledged pilot the way was easy enough. A pilot receives a salary of four hundred dollars a month. A pilot always dresses well,— better than any body else, better even than captains and steamboat owners do; but he has no other necessary expenses. He has his board and lodging free, whether in port or on the river. As I had no bad habits,

no habits of any kind indeed that cost me anything, I was able to save all my salary except what I spent to keep myself perfectly dressed. Even in port I spent nothing, because I cared for nothing there. I very rarely attended the theatre or opera. I spent my time on board, reading.

"As my money began accumulating I invested it in steamboat property, and as I knew all the ins and outs of river traffic, my investments were enormously profitable. On one occasion, for example, I took advantage of high water, bought a little dinky steamboat for five thousand dollars, sent her up the Tallahatchie, where there hadn't been a steamboat for a year before, and where the banks were covered mountain high with cotton bales that had waited months for a market. Within three months that little boat earned a clear ten thousand dollars in freight money for me, and I sold her for nearly as much as she had cost me.

"I'm telling you all this by way of explaining myself. Let me shorten the story by saying that I am now a very large owner of

steamboat property. I have as much money as any reasonable man ought to want, and as I have such men as Budd Doble, Tom Leathers, John Cannon, Captain Bell and the like for my partners, my investments will go on making money for me wherever I may be. So I am free to linger here in Virginia as long as I like. How long that will be, I do not know. It all depends."

He did not say upon what it depended.

XII

AS the months passed by, the affection between Colonel Shenstone and Valorie — the hale old gentleman and the fresh-hearted young girl — grew steadily tenderer. If she had been his daughter in fact, instead of his adopted daughter, his care of her could not have been more chivalrous or more loving, nor could her affection for him have been greater than it was. If they had been a boy and a girl, brother and sister, twins, their comradery could not have been closer or more constant. If Valorie had been a duchess or the most dignified lady in the land, Colonel Shenstone's courtesy to her could not have been more scrupulous. When she entered a room he rose and brought her a chair — never the one in which he had been sitting, but another, so that in accepting it she need have no feeling that she was disturbing him.

If she were called out of the room he rose and held the door open for her. If the glow of the fire — for the frosts of autumn had come — seemed too strong for her, he was the first to discover it and to place a face screen for her protection. At table she, as the lady of the house, was the first to be helped, under the rule to which all old Virginians owed allegiance, that no matter what guests might be present, the gentlewoman who presided over the household was entitled to precedence over all others.

Manners among the younger generation, were less formal than they had been in his youth, less observant of the nicer courtesies of life. Colonel Shenstone regarded this as a mark of degeneracy, as indeed it was, and he would tolerate nothing of the kind in the treatment accorded to Valorie by young men visiting his house. One such ventured one day to address her as "Miss Val," whereupon the Colonel arose and with stately dignity said:

"Permit me, sir, to present you to my daughter, *Miss Page.*"

The rebuke had its effect.

The old gentleman's own behavior toward her was equally circumspect. His intimacy was far greater, of course, than he permitted to any one else, and he continued to call her — in private — by the pet name he had given to her, "Little Minx," but never once did he permit himself to address her in that way in the presence of persons outside the household. Never did he light his pipe in her presence without asking her permission. Never for one moment did he forget the deference that he held to be her right by virtue of her womanhood first and also because she was the mistress of Woodlands.

At first all this unwonted consideration frightened the girl somewhat, for she had always thitherto been taught to think of herself as a chit of a child, subject to continual governance, and possessed of no claim to consideration of any kind. But the new conditions did not spoil her in the least. They acted as the sunshine in a garden does upon a flowering plant recently released from a pot-bound state and transplanted into a wholesome soil with free access to the sun and rain. All the be-

numbing effects of restraint and repression passed away. The morbid self-consciousness of her former hampered condition was replaced by a wholesome consciousness of her womanhood, a proper sense of her dignity, and an inspiring recognition of her right to consideration.

Phil Shenstone observed with astonishment the rapidity of her development from awkward childhood into a complacent if unassertive womanhood, and he observed with delight that nothing of value in her character was lost in the process. All her sweet sincerity of soul remained. All her enthusiasms survived, even the childlikeness of her spirit was in no way impaired by the elimination of the childishness. Observing her closely at this time, he decided that she was destined to become the most perfect type of admirable womanhood he had ever known. He lacked the self-knowledge necessary to perceive that in his eyes this was not a matter of destiny but of present fact — that she was already quite all that he thought her destined to become.

In her new capacity as mistress of the great-

est plantation home in that part of Virginia, Valorie speedily grasped and understood conditions. She quickly caught the methods of the time and country, and, applying them she wrought a revolution in the old mansion. For twenty years past there had been no social life there, because for twenty years past there had been no gentlewoman in charge. On her first attendance at church Valorie had observed that every young woman invited every other young woman to go home with her to spend the ensuing week, and that those young women who secured the most desirable guests in this way were sure to have as visitors during the week, the most as well as the most desirable young gentlemen.

On her first attendance at church Valorie had invited nobody, because she had not yet realized her position or the duties and privileges appertaining to it. When she understood, and after Colonel Shenstone had reminded her of her duties as the hostess of a great plantation, she issued her invitations right and left, and carried away with her a group of young gentlewomen whose presence

at Woodlands insured a liberal supply of young men visitors, some of whom passed nights there, others only the days, but all of whom came unannounced and without special invitation, taking the hospitality of the house so much for granted that often half a dozen unannounced guests would ride up, only half an hour before the four o'clock dinner time. Some of these would remain over night or even for two or three days, taking their welcome for granted, as they were fully warranted in doing by the custom of the country. Sometimes they would ride up just in time for supper, and always there were places and a welcome for them.

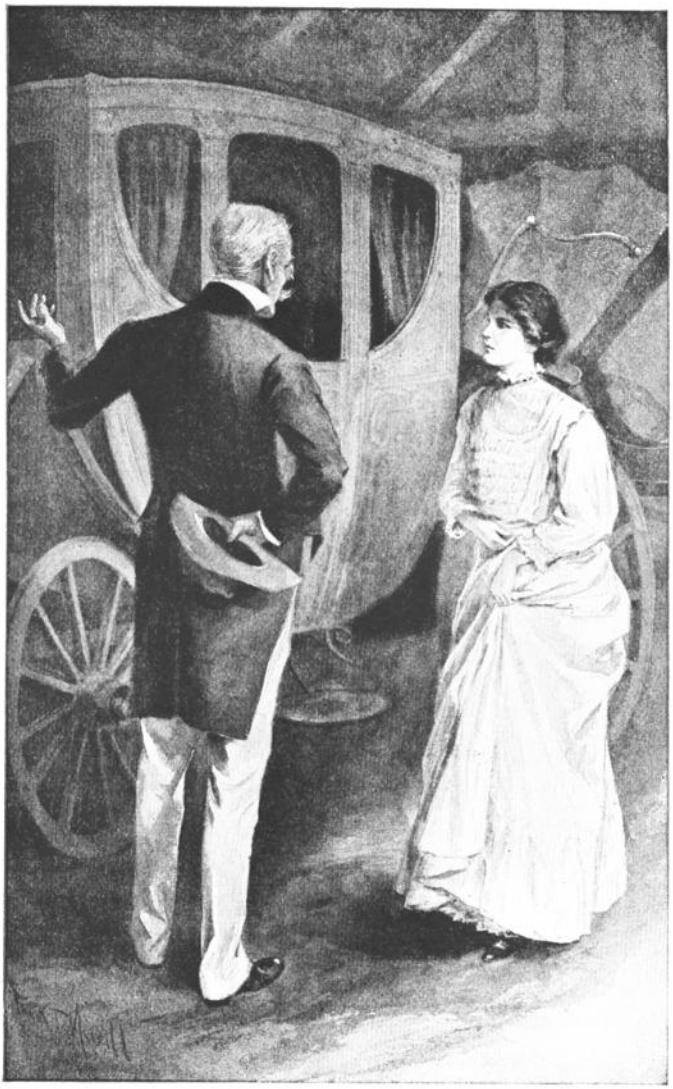
In brief, under Valorie's administration, and to Colonel Shenstone's delight, the life of the old mansion — suspended for a score of years — was re-established.

Valorie's musical education had been something far superior to anything known in that region, and it constituted a peculiar attraction. She played divinely upon the piano, the harp, the violin, the guitar and the then little known Spanish instrument, the mandolin. She even

played upon the dulcimer, a queer instrument, wholly unknown in that region until then. Colonel Shenstone had learned that fact by accident, and had straightway sent to Germany for a dulcimer, just as he had ordered a new carriage built for her and a pair of young horses broken to draw it.

When the new carriage came, he ordered the old one deposited in what he called "the museum," and invited his "Little Minx" to go with him thither to inspect the curiosities. These consisted of fifteen or twenty vehicles of antique and long abandoned patterns, mostly cumbersome and all curious in the elaboration of their decayed elegance.

"Here," he said to her, "is our patent of Virginia nobility. In this building are stored all the plantation carriages that have carried the great dames and lovely damsels of the Shenstone family, since it was first established in Virginia in 1635. The earliest were brought from England during the first century and a half of the family's dominance — pardon me, I meant to say establishment — here. The rest were built in America, but all of them



"HERE IS OUR PATENT OF VIRGINIA NOBILITY." —*Page 102.*

were used by the women of our ancient family and all of them are redolent of memories that it is worth while to cherish as an inheritance — memories of gentlewomen who, as maids, wives and mothers, did their duty bravely, dignifiedly and with full appreciation of the privilege of duty doing. The carriage we are adding to the collection to-day was bought for my wife when she was my bride. It is sadly out of date now, as I am, but it is fragrant with memories of as noble a woman as ever bore our family name. The new carriage in which you will drive to church tomorrow, will be placed in the museum when it shall have grown antiquated. It will be reminiscent of my Little Minx. I trust there will be those living at that time who will justly value it on that account."

Colonel Shenstone was a sentimentalist as every man is who is worthy to live among his fellowmen. It is the sentimentalist alone who keeps life sweet and lifts it above the level of a quarry worked by slaves under the lash of necessity. It is sentiment that prompts us to all courtesy in life. It is sentiment that makes

the child love and the grown man revere his mother. It is sentiment that makes us tender in our treatment of children, courteous and protective in our relations with women, honest and fair in our dealings with men. In brief, it is sentiment and sentiment alone, that lifts us above the level of the brute beasts and makes of this world of ours something better than a pig stye. Sentiment represents the dominance of the moral and intellectual side of our nature over our brute passions, the conquest of mere appetite by our higher nature, the reign of the spiritual over the grossly animal part of human nature. The man who declaims against sentiment and scorns romance, is a man to be feared and avoided, a man who would rob the sunset of its glory, wash the green out of the grass and the foliage, and strip the gold from fields of ripening grain, if there were profit in the process.

If we would preserve to human existence that which makes it worthier than the presence of the clods under our feet, we must set our faces resolutely against that materialism, that utilitarianism that discovers merit only in gain

and that would banish all high ideals from our lives on the ground that they do not "pay."

Sentiment is the father of all heroism, the nursing mother of all self-sacrifice. It is the inspiration of philanthropy, the impulsive force of justice, the creator of all kindliness — the one redeeming quality that prompts an omniscient God to let men live at all.

XIII

DURING all this time Valorie had been pursuing her studies in several diverse directions. Under tutelage of Edna Spottswood, several years older than herself, who was a Virginia housewife to the manner born, and who was Valorie's intimate, she was learning all the intricacies of domestic science which are now taught in college "courses," and learning them much more thoroughly and above all much more practically than any college course can teach them. In return she was teaching Edna all the mysteries of fine needlework that she had learned in the convent. She was also improving Edna's French, and teaching her more of music than the governess-trained Virginia girl had ever imagined to exist.

But chief among her own studies, Valorie was exploring English literature, under Phil

Shenstone's guidance. She had said to him one day:

"Mr. Phil, I am painfully ignorant. These Virginia girls make me ashamed, with their knowledge of Byron, Shakespeare, Dickens, Wordsworth and a lot more whose names I can't recall. You see, in the convent we read the Lives of the Saints, and the Imitation of Christ, and a book about chivalry, and that was about all. Won't you tell me what to read?"

Thereupon Phil had undertaken her instruction in that department of learning, and under his guidance she had utilized all her spare hours in reading the classics of our language.

Incidentally it may be recorded that Phil Shenstone had mightily enjoyed the exercise of his function as tutor. Perhaps that was because Valorie was an unusually quick and bright-minded pupil, who learned rapidly. Perhaps it was because her questionings of him revealed a peculiarly tender and sympathetic nature. Perhaps it was because her interest in what she read was charmingly insatiable. Perhaps it was because of many other things.

Perhaps it was because Phil Shenstone had

fallen in love with Valorie Page without himself knowing the fact.

Putting all " perhapses " aside, the fact was apparent that by diligent reading, Valorie rapidly improved her mind, enlarged her views, and equipped herself for the social life she was leading in which an acquaintance with literature was a matter of course. Wisely enough, Phil set her to read Motley and Prescott and Macaulay, as well as the novelists, adding Thiers's French Revolution, Grote's History of Greece, Buckle's History of Civilization, the first volume of which had just appeared, and a number of other such books by way of giving her a groundwork of historical knowledge upon which to stand while studying life in the presentment of fiction.

But Valorie's thirst for knowledge did not confine itself to books by any means. She even more determinedly studied everything that might in any degree equip her for her duties as mistress of Woodlands. When the December cold came and Colonel Shenstone planned the annual hog-killing, she entreated him to postpone it for three or four days, giving no

reason, and he, asking no reason but "just to please my Little Minx," did so. Thereupon Valorie drove daily over to Mattapony,— the Spottswood plantation, — where she knew that hog-killing was already in progress, and besought Edna, with the aid of her servants, to teach her all there was to know about the preparation of hams, shoulders and middlings for the smoke house, the sousing of pigs' feet, ears and noses, the making of brawn, the care of livers, hearts and kidneys, the making of sausage, the preparation of chidlings, the rendering of lard and all the rest of it, especially the making of pigs' foot jelly, a dainty of which Colonel Shenstone was particularly fond. After three successive days of diligent study she announced her readiness for hog-killing at Woodlands, and when she served to Colonel Shenstone a glass of jelly with thick cream and he found it perfect for the first time in twenty years, her rejoicing was great.

Socially Valorie was altogether successful. The young women of the community were drawn to her by her transparent simplicity, by

her impulse of modest self-effacement, by her utter unpretentiousness when, they realized, as mistress of Woodlands and heiress to that great estate, she might easily have been pardoned much of arrogant presumption. But chiefly it was her sweetness and wholesomeness of character that attracted them. She was the sort of girl who must be loved or hated, and the young women round about found it far easier to love than to hate her.

Then, too, the elderly women thoroughly approved her. She had a certain deferential way of treating them,— learned in the convent perhaps,— which made her presence altogether pleasing to them.

As for the middle-aged men, those of them who had sons urgently advised them to make the most of their opportunities with Valorie Page, and the young men did so with an eagerness that rejuvenated Woodlands house and made it seem to Colonel Shenstone what it had been in his own youth when his sister was the belle of that region.

The young men were jealous of each other, of course, but the bitterness of their jealousy

was reserved for Colonel Shenstone. Whenever they proposed a ride or a game or whatever else, Valorie would make her consent dependent upon Colonel Shenstone's need of her attention or her company. If in the midst of a madcap frolic on the lawn, she saw him come out into the porch, she would instantly leave all the rest to their own devices and go to him. In winter, if he grew weary of the music or the dancing or whatever else there might be going on in the parlor, and sought to slip away to "the chamber," which was the family sitting room in every old Virginia mansion, Valorie would call some other girl to the piano, suggest something that was sure to entertain the company, and then quietly slip away "to smoke with Uncle Butler," as she phrased it, he doing the smoking while she sat by his side, he petting her and rejoicing in the devotion of his "Little Minx." Her affection for him was limitless, and her devotion unrestrained by any other consideration whatever.

She thought not at all of reward, but her reward was a rich one when she understood that she was bringing a measureless happiness

into the life of this old man, who had for so long known nothing more of happiness than is implied in the possession of abundance and the servile ministrations of those who are bound to service.

He had adopted her as his daughter, in fact, though not in legal form. A more important fact was that she had adopted him as her father, and that in every tender way imaginable, she treated him as such, with never a reserve, never a stinting of affectionate attention.

One day Phil spoke of this rejoicingly.

"If you never did anything else good in all your life, Val," he said, "you are doing enough to make an angel of yourself, in bringing so much of happiness into my uncle's declining years."

"Thank you," she said. "You know that is all I'm living for. As Byron says, 'The rest is leather and prunella.' That reminds me, I must write to Hall, the shoeman, to-day, or I shall presently be barefoot. But Mr. Phil, you know how generously good to me Uncle Butler is. Shouldn't I be a very bad

girl or a very stupid one if I didn't find out how to make him happy and do it with all my might?"

Phil looked at her admiringly, lovingly. Then he said:

"You are neither bad nor stupid, Val; and Uncle Butler is by no means the only person in this world whom you are rendering happy. As for finding out how to do that — you need no guidance. Your love will take care of that."

Valorie made no reply. She went away and thought about what he had said. Somehow the words meant more to her than any other words she had ever heard, perhaps because Phil Shenstone's approval had come to mean more to her than she as yet knew.

XIV

AMONG the younger men who were frequent visitors at Woodlands, was one who from the first commanded Valorie's admiration and sympathy. This was Dr. Greg Tazewell.

He owned a prosperous plantation, which he conducted successfully, but the greater part of his attention was given to his practice of medicine on the plantations round about.

He had called upon Phil, on his return to Virginia, and had paid his respects to Valorie, dining informally at Woodlands on several occasions, and during the autumn visiting the plantation frequently to shoot with Phil. He was a young man of excellent address, modest, unassuming, but as Valorie began early to suspect, intellectual beyond the common. He was handsome in face and person, blond, curly-

haired, and abounding in healthy animal spirits. His bubbling good humor was so constant indeed, that at first Valorie failed to recognize the deeper things in his nature.

It was not until she met him under more trying circumstances that she began to understand what stuff he was made of. As mistress of the plantation it was Valorie's function to care for all those who might fall ill, and late in the autumn one of the negro women was very ill indeed. It was in his tireless attendance upon this patient that Greg Tazewell unconsciously revealed himself at his best to the singularly alert perceptions of the young woman.

The case was a desperate one, and he met it with desperate determination and with all of skill he could command. Night after night he remained in the negro cabin, engaged in a fight for a human life. With his own hands he administered experimental treatments that he dared not leave to hands less skilled than his. Upon rare occasions he went to the great house for a meal; usually, however, he asked that something for him to eat might be sent

to the cabin, he feeling that he must not leave his patient for a moment.

The crisis came at night and Valorie remained with him by the bedside until nearly morning. As she looked at him he seemed to her very weary, but not for one moment did he relax his attention to his patient. For thrice twenty-four hours he had had no sleep except such naps as he caught while sitting upon a backless stool before the cabin fire. On this night of crisis he had not closed his eyes at all. Indeed, Valorie reflected, he had not even sat down for a moment throughout the long hours, and his young face was haggard as she saw it now in the flickering firelight, in itself suggestive of that going out of life which he was battling to prevent.

At last, after another examination of the patient, his features seemed to relax, something of its customary joyousness returned to his countenance, and quitting the bedside, he threw three or four sticks of wood upon the long-neglected fire. Then turning to Valorie he said:

"You had better go to the house and to

bed. The necessity for watching is over."

"Is Jane to die then, after all?"

"No. She will get well. Go now and get some rest. Only nursing will be needed and the negro women can attend to that, if you see them three or four times a day. Go. I don't want you for a patient."

"But how about yourself, doctor?"

"Me? Oh, I am all right. I'm tough, you know. I must remain here for an hour or so longer. Then I'll go to the house, get Henry to bring me a tub of cold water, and present myself at breakfast as fresh as the morning. But you must go. It is five o'clock. You must get several hours' sleep before the breakfast hour."

"Thank you, I'll try," she said. Then looking at him earnestly, she said:

"I admire heroes, and surely you are one."

"Oh, no, not at all. Only a doctor. I'll put it all into my bill."

The flippancy was meant as a parrying of embarrassing praise, but it shocked Valorie and distressed her. Her own sympathy with the sick woman had been so long under strain

that release from it brought to her only a chastened, solemn, thankful rejoicing. She knew nothing of the necessity a physician is under to control his sympathies as he must control other emotions, reducing all of them to a principle rather than merely a feeling. Nor did she recognize Greg Tazewell's purpose in this instance, which was to relieve her mind by his own lightness of manner and speech, and to assure her by his tone that his confident prediction of his patient's recovery was surely destined to fulfillment.

Her admiration of him was great, but it was tempered just now by disappointment.

When he appeared at the breakfast table, announcing that after an hour's sleep he had induced Henry to pour a dozen bucketsful of frost-sharpened water over his person, so that he felt quite young again, she was troubled with the thought that after all, his devotion to his patient had been born solely of professional enthusiasm, and that no touch of genuine human sympathy had redeemed it. But presently, during a lull in the table talk, he turned to her with all the earnestness in his face that

she had seen there during his struggle with the malady and said:

"I've seen Jane again. I went there just before coming to breakfast. She's going to get well, but I wish you'd detail some more sympathetic person than Lizzie to act as her nurse. Lizzie is impatient with her and a very little friction might set her recovery back. I wonder if Elsie could be spared."

As he made this appeal, saying more with his eyes and his mobile face than in the words he uttered, Valorie felt that she was justified in again setting him upon his pedestal as a hero.

Her reply was prompt.

"I'll send Elsie to stay until nightfall. After that I shall be there myself. Elsie is gentle and kindly, but at night she'd go to sleep. I'll watch to-night myself."

"Believe me, it isn't necessary," he replied, "and you are already —"

"I'm young and strong," she answered. "I do not want the scientific results you have achieved to be sacrificed by any failure of care."

There was a note of bitterness in her tone. He observed it, but made no reply.

When breakfast was done she told him that a messenger had come for him from a distant plantation and was waiting to speak with him. He asked that the messenger might be brought to him, and when the boy come he asked:

"Who is ill at the Oaks?"

"Uncle Michael, Mas' Greg. His rheumatiz is awful bad. He's mos' daid."

"Very well," answered the doctor going to his saddlebags and compounding a lotion. "Have him rubbed with this, and keep the rubbing up till he is ready to go to sleep. Tell your master I could do nothing more for him if I were there, and tell him I am bound to remain here for the day. If Michael grows worse — and I don't think he will — tell your master he will have to send for another physician. I simply cannot leave here till night. A life might depend upon my presence. Do you understand?"

Satisfied from the bewildered look in the negro's face that he did not understand, he said:

"Wait a minute. I'll send a note to your master."

With that he went to the desk that stood in the hall of every old Virginia house for the use of all who needed to write, and tried to pen a missive. Presently he turned to Phil Shenstone and besought him to act as amanuensis, saying:

"My hand is too unsteady to write."

Phil signaled to Valorie, and she instantly seated herself at the desk to take the dictation. When it was done and the messenger had gone, she turned to Tazewell with a world of tender sympathy in her look and said:

"If we are not to have another patient to care for, doctor, you must go to bed. Your room is ready for you, and I'll see to it that all household noises are suppressed. I will even forbid Uncle Butler and Mr. Phil to talk at any point less remote than the stables. But tell me; is the old man Michael in sore need of your presence?"

"Yes, and no. He is suffering greatly, I have no doubt. But I could do nothing more than I have done by sending him the lotion

and ordering prolonged massage. He is eighty years old, he says. He has chronic rheumatism, and in the natural course of events it is going to kill him presently. I couldn't prevent that if I were present. It isn't like Jane's case in which we had the strong constitution of a vigorous young woman to build upon. Michael is ten miles away, and I simply must not quit this plantation till I see Jane asleep after ten o'clock tonight."

Seeing a queer look in the girl's face, and misinterpreting it, he hastily added:

"Oh, she's going to get well, you may rest assured. But for this first day of her recovery I must watch her, and I will. I've no notion of letting all we've done be wasted."

Again Valorie was shocked and distressed. Again she misinterpreted his meaning and misunderstood the spirit in which he had spoken. It seemed to her that he had no care for the human life he had saved, for the woman and mother whom his skill and tireless devotion had snatched from the grasp of death and was presently to restore to her brood of

little children. It seemed to her that his concern was solely for the results his science had achieved, with no touch or trace of tender human sympathy and compassion in it.

Nevertheless she was quick to recognize his own exhaustion as that was illustrated by his tremulous inability to control a pen. With full faith in the accepted therapeutics of the time and country, she asked him if she should not bring him a dram.

"No, my dear Miss Page," he answered. "In cases of actual exhaustion I sometimes prescribe alcoholic stimulation. But I never resort to it as a means of steadying shaken nerves or repairing the results of mere fatigue. In such ways alcohol is effective for the moment, but in the end it is what Solomon called wine — a mocker. My nerves are shamefully unsettled, but that is only because for the space of four hours last night, I stood facing death and fighting it. During all that time I had reason to fear we should lose in the struggle and that in spite of all I might do, that poor woman must die. Now that we have won the game and I am freed from the terrible

apprehension, there is a very natural relaxation and my nerves have given way under it. I need only to sleep a little. If I may, I will accept your invitation and go to my room for two hours. At the end of that time, please have me waked without fail. Jane will take nourishment then, and I *must* be there to see it administered and observe the results."

Again Valorie misunderstood. His phrase about observing results suggested to her anew that his interest in Jane was neither personal nor human, but purely, and very coldly scientific.

He did not leave Woodlands until the next day,— not until he was able to leave Jane in Elsie's charge in full assurance that her convalescence was certain.

As he was leaving he seemed to seek converse with Valorie, and Phil, who was warming his back in front of the great wood fire in the hall, suddenly remembered some duty that required his instant withdrawal from the house. These were two gentlemen of Virginia, neither of whom would think of standing in the other's way in the slightest partic-

ular. When he had gone, young Tazewell took Valorie's hand, and looking into her eyes scrutinizingly, said:

"I'm afraid you don't approve of me?"

She returned the gaze unflinchingly and answered:

"I do, and I don't. I know you are a hero, but sometimes I think your devotion to science makes you cold-blooded."

He looked at her intently for a moment. Then he said, with emphasis:

"Appearances are sometimes deceptive, but one doesn't know himself half as well as others know him. You may be right. Good-bye. I shall not need to see Jane again. Tell Elsie to carry out the instructions I have given her. What a superb morning it is! I think I shall ride twenty miles or so just to enjoy being alive. Good day."

He was gone, and Valorie wondered if she had offended him. For Valorie was only a little more than eighteen years old and she was sensitive as regards others.

Besides she really did regard Greg Tazewell as a hero.

XV

PHIL SHENSTONE had found it necessary to prolong his stay in Virginia indefinitely for several reasons. For one thing his letters from Louisiana convinced him that there was serious danger impending over Valorie's head. He said nothing of this either to Valorie or to his uncle, but to Greg Tazewell he talked of it, though very guardedly, and in the privacy of Tazewell's bachelor home.

"I want you to know certain things, Greg, that may arise to annoy Valorie. I am not going to tell you her story in detail. There are reasons why I should not do that — as yet."

"I can well believe that," answered the doctor, "and of course, I should never tolerate in myself anything remotely resembling an impertinent curiosity concerning the personal

history of a young lady whose character I esteem so highly. You and I both stand ready to minister in every possible way to the welfare of a young lady whom we both esteem. I am ready to do that to the utmost limit of the law, and as far beyond that limit as may be necessary."

"I know all that, my dear fellow," answered Phil, with a certain touch — not exactly of melancholy, but of resignation — in his tone. "I know all that and I reckon upon it."

"Do you know, Phil, that you have a very bad habit of interrupting? I was going on to say, that, holding this attitude, I want you to tell me precisely so much of Miss Valorie Page's history or situation, or whatever else it is, as you may think it desirable for me to know, and not one word more. So far as serving her, or defending her, or doing anything and everything else for her is concerned, I am ready, in poker slang, to 'go it blind.'"

"Thank you," said Phil. Then he sat for a long time in silence, as if ordering his thoughts. At last he arose, filled a long-stemmed Powhatan pipe, lighted it, and

smoked for a while in silence. Finally he said:

"All that I need tell you now is that Valorie is in danger through a perversion of the law. I am staying here to meet that danger and I may need your help."

"Excuse me for interrupting," said the other, "but I have already said that any and every help I can render shall be forthcoming whenever you call for it."

"Thank you. I knew that before. Now I have fully considered this matter, and I have made up my mind. If the danger comes, it will be through court processes, and with my uncle's ingenious knowledge of the law, I shall fight the peril in the courts as long as there is a leg to stand upon there. If I am beaten in that, I shall fight it with shotguns."

"That is all right," cheerfully answered the other. "My shotgun is ready and so is its owner, Greg Tazewell, A. M., M. D., Ph. D., country doctor, planter and by no means a bad wing shot, as you can testify."

"I know, Greg. I only wanted you to be

prepared for emergencies. I should have counted upon you at any rate."

Having decided to remain in Virginia thus indefinitely, Phil Shenstone planned to put in his time in those studies of which he felt the need as a supplement to his interrupted education. To that end he decided to remove himself from Woodlands to his own nearly worthless little plantation of Fox Harbor, where there was a comfortable little dwelling house, and where he thought the ministrations of his seventeen more or less decrepit negroes, old and young, might serve to keep a home going.

"I shall have three regular cooks," he said to Valorie, "and two extras. From such observations as I have been able to make, at least one of the regular cooks will recognize her fitness for duty each day, and if not, perhaps the extras will be able to give me my breakfast. If worse comes to worst, it is only three miles to Woodlands. I've a negro boy who can clean dry mud off my boots, under my personal superintendence, and I do not despair

of teaching him to do other small services. There are two women who profess a certain acquaintance with the mysteries of laundry work, so that on the whole I shall be able to live, perhaps, especially as I shall be sustained by the consoling reflection that I am a landed proprietor."

At that point in the conversation, Colonel Shenstone appeared and, having caught some part of the conversation, demanded to know the rest of the matter. After Phil had explained his plan, the old gentleman, whose gout was giving him a good deal of trouble that day, broke out into a passionate denunciation of his nephew's ingratitude, and ended by "daring" him again so much as to hint at the possibility of his quitting Woodlands for any other place whatever, so long as he should remain in Virginia. The old gentleman's tone was wrathful, but — as he afterwards gently explained — the wrath was directed, not against Phil, but at the twinges of gout that were torturing him. Having finished his speech he started to hobble out of the room, but presently stopping, he dropped into a chair and

resting his foot upon a stool, which Valorie was alert to place conveniently, said:

"Phil, my dear boy, I'm growing old and I need you. I can't even look after the plantation half the time now, and there are other things of vastly greater importance that you must take off my shoulders. Forgive me if I was harsh —"

"Not another word, Uncle, I beg of you. We are two gentlemen of Virginia, and we understand each other without apologies. I am ready to help you in every way I can."

"Yes, I know that. I shall be better in a day or two, and then we must set to work together over some papers. In the meanwhile I wish you'd send a boy over for Dr. Tazewell. He generally manages to ease my gout."

So the conversation ended in amity, and Phil Shenstone abandoned his purpose of quitting Woodlands for a residence of his own.

XVI

DURING Tazewell's stay at Woodlands, prolonged until Col. Shenstone's suffering from gout was mercifully alleviated, he had opportunity for converse with Valorie and he made the fullest possible use of it. It was the best of his habits never to neglect an opportunity.

One evening when the Indian summer had brought a soft warm atmosphere, and the moon, a little short of the full, was flooding the landscape with its mellow, soothing light, he and she met in the porch. The moonlight tempted them, and without plan or purpose they wandered away to the edge of the woodlands, and gazed into the blackness beyond without speech, where speech was unnecessary. The glory of the evening was enough. But when a young woman and a young man are thus strolling together in the moonlight,

there comes to both at last a vague feeling that speech of some sort is requisite, if only to avoid misapprehension. So presently Valorie said, "Jane is well again, thanks to your skill, Doctor."

"Thanks to my reckless daring, rather," he replied.

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"Why, when I saw that she must die under any recognized treatment, I tried an experiment upon her which I had long been thinking of. It was a desperate chance, but as she must die without it, I decided at last to try it and it succeeded. I saved Jane's life by doing what all the books and all the authorities condemn, and I have had to exercise a good deal of self-control to avoid boasting in the report I have made of the case in the medical journals. It was a hazardous experiment. It might have hastened death by many hours, but it succeeded in saving a life and it has been a joy to me to report the case for the instruction of others."

Valorie utterly misinterpreted his mood and his meaning.

"Then Jane was only a 'subject' to you, a person who offered you an opportunity for experimentation. You didn't care whether she lived or died. You had no concern for her brood of little children. She was to you only a negro slave woman — worth five hundred dollars to her master, or about that, and you were anxious to save her life only in the interest of her owner, but seeing that ordinary means to that end were likely to prove ineffective, you decided to make her the subject of a scientific experiment at risk of shortening her life by those hours which Divine Providence was granting her, perhaps, for repentance and the saving of her immortal soul. I am shocked, distressed, horrified. Let me go back to the house. Stay here till I enter the grounds. Good night. I am sorry to part with you thus."

It was obviously futile to follow the young woman or to attempt speech in explanation. The entrance to the house grounds was less than a quarter of a mile away, and the flooding moonlight enabled the young man to see her clearly throughout that distance as she

hurriedly retreated. He followed slowly, and half an hour later he was telling Phil Shenstone the details of the quarrel.

"She will think differently of the matter," said Phil, "when she understands; and I will see that she understands."

There was an ache at his heart as he gave the promise, for he saw in Valorie's resentment of what she thought unworthy in Greg Tazewell, the surest of all possible signs that the young physician had awakened a dangerously active interest in her heart, and, while he persuaded himself that he was not Greg Tazewell's rival in that respect, he nevertheless was saddened by the discovery, and he found himself all the next morning, planning an early return to his business affairs in the West.

He was a gentleman, however, and as such his loyalty to his friend dominated every other impulse in his mind.

So on that morning, after Tazewell had taken his departure, Phil asked Valorie to ride with him to the little plantation he had inherited, and on which he was trying to devise a

scheme by which his negroes might be made self-supporting, or nearly so. There were some good apple trees on the place and Phil had ordered the apples gathered a month or so earlier and stored in the cellar, with no very definite idea of what he should do with them, but with an instinctive impulse to prevent waste. Valorie had almost a child's appetite for apples, and as there were some specially fine varieties among these, Phil ordered plates, napkins and fruit knives, and set her to eating them in the porch, for the Indian summer weather was still favorable to indulgence in the out-of-doors. After he had peeled an Albemarle pippin for her, he entered upon the conversation for which he had brought her forth.

"You are displeased with Greg," he said, half assertively, half questioningly.

"Yes," she said, and she said no more, a fact that left him with an awkward conversational problem to solve. He waited awhile before venturing further to question her, for Valorie had a strange way of thinking for herself, which seemed to have come to her

since her residence at Woodlands had begun, and it puzzled Phil Shenstone a good deal. That was because he knew nothing of the difference between a girl, accustomed to have her thinking and her life dominated by persons in authority — such a girl as she had been when she came to Woodlands — and a woman permitted and encouraged to think for herself — such as she had become under his own tutelage and still more under the tutelage and the generous comradery of Colonel Shenstone. At last he said, however:

"I think you misunderstand and misinterpret him. I wish you would tell me all that is in your mind."

"Thank you, Mr. Phil, I will," she said, with eagerness, tossing the apple from her plate to the hens before the door, rinsing her fingers and drying them. "I'm glad to do so. He puzzles me. I can't make him out. He does things in a heroic, self-sacrificing way, that makes me think of him as — well, as one of God's own — but he spoils all that by saying things that show me how cold-blooded he is, and convince me that after all, he feels

no human sympathy, that all his efforts are inspired only by a cold, scientific desire to find out things."

Then she went on, passionately, to relate all that had occurred at the bedside of the negro woman, Jane, and all that had occurred afterwards, ending with an account of what he had said the night before with regard to the desperate experiment he had made in Jane's case.

"Of course that was right enough," she said, "so far as the experiment itself was concerned. Jane would have died if he had not made it. But he seems more interested in the result of the experiment than in the saving of Jane's life, and that is what makes me mad — pardon me, I should say that is what angers me."

"Your first phrase was good enough," he replied. "It was idiomatic English, and I like that better than the English of the rhetoric books."

"I wish you wouldn't do that," she said, impatiently.

"Do what, Valorie?"

"Why talk in that cold-blooded way when we're discussing things that tear my soul to pieces. When you do that I don't like you any better than I do Dr. Tazewell. It is all words, words, words, and I hate words when they do not express thought and feeling. Why don't you say something to satisfy me — something about what we have been talking about?"

"I'm coming to that presently," he responded. "I want you to be in a mood to listen calmly before I begin on that theme. I'll go and give Niah some directions, and perhaps when I come back you'll be sufficiently self-possessed to listen. I'll be back in ten minutes."

As he went away the girl rose and promenaded the porch three or four times. Then she tripped down the steps and plucked a belated chrysanthemum, which she held in her tremulous hands as a means of self-control.

"He is pleading for his friend," she thought, "as if it were for himself. I wonder why he does that? Why should he care what I think of Dr. Greg Tazewell, and never

care to find out what I think of himself?"

"I want to tell you about Tazewell," he said, when they were seated again. "He is altogether a hero. His whole life, and all his abilities are given up to the service of humanity. There isn't a selfish thought in his being, and what you condemn as his cold-bloodedness is only his enthusiasm. Let me tell you. He inherited a plantation and negroes, as you know, which assured him a luxurious living. He might have been content with that, and most young men would have been. But his is a generous nature. He could not reconcile himself to the leading of a life of ease. He read philosophy,— English, German and French. He accepted the thought that every men is in debt to the world for all of good that it gives him. He set out to render the world a service commensurate with its good gifts to him. He studied medicine in Philadelphia. Then he went abroad for several years, to equip himself more perfectly. On his return he might have settled in some great city with the certainty of winning renown. But it was not renown that he sought. He

wanted to render service. He was convinced that a physician so well equipped as he was, could do more in the way of investigation and discovery for the benefit of mankind, in a country practice in Virginia, where there were negroes of strong constitution to experiment upon, than in any other way. So putting aside all selfish considerations, he settled down here. Let me tell you some of the results. A year or two ago, by experiment, he invented a device which is now in use by physicians everywhere, and which has wrought something like miracles in the alleviation of human suffering and the saving of human life. Recently he has devised another thing for the treatment and cure of a distressing malady which until now has been open only to temporary alleviation. So important is this that his old instructors in Paris have summoned him to go to France next spring to expound it for the benefit of humanity. Now in Jane's case, he saw a woman about to die. No recognized treatment could save her. He had long had in mind a treatment which he believed might prove effective. He had never

dared try it, but in a case like that, where death was certain without it, he ventured. He saved Jane's life, and that meant much to him, but can you blame him if his chief concern was for the other lives that were to be saved by his demonstration of the efficacy of the treatment? Can you wonder that the results of the experiment seem to him of far greater consequence than the person on whom it was made?"

"I have been wrong," she said. "He is the hero I thought him to be before I misjudged him. Thank you for telling me."

As she rose and passed into the house the tears glistened upon her cheeks, and Phil Shenstone utterly misinterpreted their appearance there. How was he to know that they were tears of admiration for his own generosity in so unselfishly pleading the cause of his friend?

XVII

THE two rode at a walk on their homeward journey. Both were engaged in perplexed thought, and neither seemed disposed to rapid motion, though they had contagiously spirited horses under them.

With the quick perception of a woman who admires and loves, but who does not acknowledge even to herself that she loves, for the reason that her love has not been openly asked, Valorie saw that Phil had misunderstood her emotion, and she knew far better than he did, all that was in her companion's mind. With the defensive instinct of proud womanhood, she felt it to be her highest duty to herself to ignore his misinterpretation or even to confirm it if opportunity should offer. "If he chooses to think — well in the way he does —" she reflected, "he must go on thinking so. He

hasn't asked me for an explanation and until he does, I certainly shall not offer any. I would crucify my own soul rather than do that."

Phil, on his part, reflected:

"She has often expressed gratitude to me for rescuing her from the life she was destined to lead. She likes me in a way, and if I should ask her to love me she would answer yes, sincerely believing that her answer was true, though in fact all of love that is in her belongs to Greg Tazewell. Her very antagonism to him when she thinks she discovers anything unworthy in his conduct or his attitude of mind, is sufficient proof of that. She so far worships him that she is madly jealous of anything and everything that tends to impair her ideal of his perfection. It is perfectly certain that she would accept any proffer of love I might make to her, and all her life she would loyally compel herself to believe in her love for me. But I know better. She loves Greg Tazewell and he loves her. He is my friend and she is in a peculiar way the subject of my care and guardianship. I must

not betray my friend even to gain the one supreme desire of my life, and still more imperatively, I must not mar her life by linking it with my own when love prompts her to unite it with that of another. It is said truly that renunciation and self-sacrifice are the secure bases of all religions that have appealed to human kind, the inspiration of all heroism. Now I am no hero; I am only a steamboat man; but at any rate I am a gentleman. I desire Valorie's happiness in life far more than I care for my own. On the whole it is time for me to go back to the western waters and attend to my own affairs."

With this thought in his mind he broke the silence that had so long endured between the two.

"Val," he said, "I find I must go back to the West almost immediately. There are matters there that need my attention. We have been building three new steamboats for the trade between Cincinnati and St. Louis, and they are to go into commission at once. You see there is a great tide of emigration from the East to the Missouri River country,

and every boat we can set going will be black with a multitude of passengers and flaming red with a cargo of farm wagons, plows, harrows, hay-rakes and every other sort of agricultural implement. Every trip of every steamboat will make a small fortune for us, and it seems necessary that I, as the largest single stockholder, should be there to look after the business."

It was well that he was not looking at Valorie's face as he said all this. As it was, she had time in which to control her emotions before he had finished. She was tempted to remind him of what he had told her — that he was a rich man, that he had money enough, that his partners in all his steamboat ventures were men capable of managing affairs without his help, and all the rest of it.

Instead, she said:

"Of course, you are right. In what you have done for me you have wasted time that must be precious to your business interests. I shall be sorry, of course, to miss our very pleasant daily intercourse, but that is a matter of no consequence in comparison with your

large business interests. You can easily arrange for the care of your negroes at Fox Harbor."

Again he misunderstood her, as, in the pride of her womanhood she meant that he should. He accepted her response as meaning that on the whole she would be glad to have his presence taken out of her life at this emotional juncture.

"Oh, yes," he answered, nonchalantly. "It is only a question of feeding and clothing those helpless creatures. Fox Harbor adjoins Greg Tazewell's plantation. I shall ask him to annex it in a sense. I'll leave a sum of money subject to his order, and ask him to see that these people of mine have an abundance to eat and plenty of clothes. As for the house, I reckon I'll board that up."

It was a full minute before Valorie answered. Perhaps she was afraid of betraying too tender an emotion in answering. If that was her purpose, she accomplished it, for when she did answer it was in a level, equable voice and in terms that restrained sentiment within entirely conventional bounds.

"That would be a pity, I think. The house is an old one, and though it is now shorn of the broad domain of which it was once the centre, it has a history of hospitality. Why not leave it open? I will go over there once or twice a week and see that your servants keep it in order. Then once a year when your birthday comes, if you'll tell me when that is, I'll give a dining day there to your friends and in your honor. You have done so much for me, Mr. Phil, that I shall be glad if you'll let me do that much for you, just in memory of our pleasant six months of association."

If any thing had been needed to convince Shenstone of the correctness of his interpretation of the girl's attitude, this friendly but seemingly unemotional utterance would have sufficed. It was clear to him that friendship and gratitude were the warmest sentiments she entertained for him. It was obvious to him that his plan of going at once to the West, and taking himself out of Valorie's life was the only wise one, the only one that promised the highest happiness for her. As for himself — he did not include himself in the reckoning.

And Valorie? As she neared her journey's end she gave rein to her horse and finished in a gallop. It seemed to her that she must break down and reveal herself in a way that would destroy her with shame, if she did not quickly reach her own room and vent her feelings in the natural, feminine way, a good cry. She saw slipping away from her all that she had subconsciously hoped for in life, all that life promised to her soul. Even yet her pride would not let her admit to herself that she loved Phil Shenstone. Indeed the very thought of such a thing, angered her and offended her *amour propre* beyond endurance. She resolutely refused to believe it. She resented it as an insult to her womanhood. She passionately denied it to her own soul, with which she was now in intense antagonism because of its impulse toward a love that was unasked and therefore shamefully impossible.

In her agitation it was her hope that she might preserve the outward seeming of equanimity until such time as she should reach the seclusion of her room.

But as the two approached the horse block

in front of the house grounds, she saw a negro boy leading Greg Tazewell's horse to the stables, and instantly the fear that Colonel Shenstone was ill again seized upon her mind and dominated it to the exclusion of all personal concerns and to the suppression of every emotion that had self for its subject or its object. For Valorie Page had learned to love Colonel Shenstone with all the passion possible to a daughter's devotion, and the thought of his renewed suffering drove all other thoughts out of her mind.

The moment she reached the entrance to the house grounds, she slipped from her saddle without waiting for Phil's help or for anything else, and, gathering up the absurdly long riding habit that Virginia Amazons always used on horseback, fled like a startled fawn to the porch where she saw Greg Tazewell carefully dropping some medicine into a glass.

"Tell me!" she cried, seizing his arm and disturbing his count; "is Uncle Butler very ill?"

With that scientific calm, which in him was often so irritating to Valorie's nerves, he

"TELL ME! IS UNCLE BUTLER VERY ILL?" — *Page 150.*

emptied the contents of the glass upon the ground beyond the rail, turned to the servant in attendance and said:

"Bring me another wine glass. No, leave that one where it is"— seeing the negro about to pick it up. "I want another. Plunge it into hot water for a full minute, and then bring it to me, dry and hot." Then turning to Valorie he answered:

"Colonel Shenstone has another attack of gout. I'll tell you about it presently. Just now I must prepare his medicine, and one drop too much might — well, it might make a difference."

She shrank back, almost as if she had received a blow, and waited until the servant should return with the glass and the doctor should drop his medicine. He said not one word in the meantime, so intent was he upon his function — and when he had done he passed into the house, still in silence, to administer the draught. It was not until he returned that he addressed her. When he did so, there was a note of sarcasm, she thought, in what he said.

"Pardon me," he began; "but you object I believe to scientific ways, and especially to experiments. Colonel Shenstone's gout has taken a form that seriously endangers his life, and he is fully conscious of the fact. With his full permission, and active sanction, I am giving him a very heroic treatment, one that ordinarily I should not venture to give to any but a man of middle life or younger, and very robust at that. It is an experiment in your uncle's case, and I must watch effects very carefully. To that end I must stay at Woodlands night and day for a time. I wonder if you could have a couch for me placed in his room. I must see him at all hours."

If he had hit her in the face with a horsewhip, the girl could scarcely have been more severely stung. His impulse had been partly one of self-justification, partly one of explanation, and partly one of apology. She interpreted it as one of rebuke and defiance, and the worst of it was that after Phil Shenstone's explanation made that morning, she felt bitterly that she deserved all of rebuke and re-reproach the young doctor could heap upon

her. It was that consciousness of ill desert indeed which gave keenest sting to his words. Had they been wanton her pride would have been panoply enough against their power to wound. But feeling as she did that she deserved them and worse, she could summon no resentment to ward them off or soften their severity.

Had she been a weaker woman she would have burst into tears and retreated to the seclusion of her own room. Being in fact a woman of strong character and extraordinary self-control, she faced him instead and said:

"You have misjudged me, Doctor, as I have misjudged you. Mr. Phil has been explaining things to me, and I see now how wrongfully I have interpreted your attitude. Please let us be friends, and whatever you can do to restore Uncle Butler to health shall have my gratitude." She paused before adding:

"I sincerely beg your pardon."

For answer he took her hand, pressed it for a moment, and then, with the courtesy of an older time that was not yet quite dead in Virginia, raised it reverently to his lips.

"We understand each other," he said, "and there should be nothing between us to forgive. You are a brave woman — brave enough to hear the truth. Colonel Shenstone's present attack is the most dangerous one he has ever had. Previous attacks have subjected him to severe pain, but to nothing worse. This one threatens something more serious."

"Do you mean that it endangers his life?"

"I fear I must say yes, but I do not despair. His gout is inherited. His own habits have always been good — even abstemious. His constitution is strong, and because of that I have decided to — pardon the phrase if it offends you — make this hazardous experiment in his case. Foreseeing as I do, that unless something can be done for the eradication of the disease, he is pretty certain to succumb to it very soon, and recognizing the strength of his constitution as a substitute for youthful vigor, I have decided to — pardon the phrase again — make the experiment. I am giving him steadily increasing doses of a powerful drug. I shall press the treatment to the limit of constitutional endurance, in the hope of

eliminating from his system the poison that gives him his attacks. I tell you frankly that I never gave such a treatment to a man of his age before, and that even in the case of younger men I should never think of giving it unless I could stay night and day with the patient, watching every symptom. But I also tell you frankly that unless some such treatment is given to him successfully, Colonel Shenstone cannot live to see another spring. I ask you frankly to say whether or not I am right in making the experiment?"

For answer she took his hand and said simply, "Thank you, and may God prosper your experiment."

Then she went into the house and ordered a couch placed for him on one side of Colonel Shenstone's bed — and on the other an easy chair for herself.

XVIII

WHEN two persons of reasonable mind have had a little quarrel and have made it up, they are very apt to grow closer together because of the difference. When the two persons involved in the quarrel and the reconciliation happen to be a young man and a young woman, they are very apt to let the newly established relations of friendship develop into the tenderer relations of love. A young man and a young woman so placed, are very apt to decide that on the whole they wish to become husband and wife. This is a general statement of probabilities, and nothing more.

As Colonel Shenstone's fine constitution yielded to the heroic treatment prescribed by Greg Tazewell, and he began to grow better, there were many opportunities and invitations to intimate converse between Greg Tazewell

and Valorie Page, and they made the most of them.

Valorie was still penitent as to her former misjudgment of the young doctor, and she sought opportunity to make amends. One evening, as they two strolled through the house grounds, each seeking relaxation from the strain of watching by the Colonel's bedside, Valorie said something so affectionate as to the doctor's care of her uncle, that he lost his head and said in reply:

"Why should not you and I become his watchers, his guardians, his tender nurses from this time forth? I love you, Valorie. Say that you can love me in return."

"I cannot say that," she answered after a moment's hesitation. "I have a great esteem for you, Doctor, and an abiding affection because of what you have done and are doing for Uncle Butler. Indeed you can never know how grateful I am to you. But gratitude is no fit return for a love such as you suggest. I feel even a greater gratitude to — well to others — but this is not love. I cannot give you love for love, and so there must be an end

of that between us. I hope and believe that we shall remain devoted friends, but — you mustn't ask for more."

Feeling that it might be embarrassing to him either to plead or not to plead, she turned and hurried into the house.

When next they two met alone, he said something which seemed to her to be a prelude to the reopening of the question. She instantly responded:

"Please don't. My decision is final. It would only distress us both to reopen the question. Let me ask you to tell me instead about the success or failure of your experiment with Uncle Butler."

"It is succeeding far better than I dared hope," he answered. "He will be up again within a few days, and I confidently believe he will have no more attacks of this dangerous nature. He will have twinges, of course, but nothing more, I hope, of this dangerous sort. I shall report the results of the experiment in the medical journals."

Instantly she was in arms again.

"Of course you will. You'd have done that if he had died under the treatment. How I hate your science!" and with that she retreated to her room, there to mourn over her fault in so resenting a scientific impulse which she knew to be in the merciful interest of humanity. An hour later she apologized and they two were friends again.

As Colonel Shenstone recovered he became more and more impressed with the danger his precarious health involved for others. On the day on which Greg Tazewell left him to complete his recovery under Valorie's care, he sent for Phil.

"My boy," he said, "so far as my own affairs are concerned, everything is perfectly arranged. But I have a lot of other people's business on my hands, and my death, which is liable to occur at any time now, might result in serious trouble to many quite innocent people. I am the administrator of several estates, the executor of many wills. It is necessary that some one shall be prepared to take my place in the event of my death —"

"But you are not going to die, Uncle," interrupted Phil. "We are not ready to consent to that."

"I quite understand," said the old soldier. "When I went into the battles of Molino el Rey and Cherubusco, and Chapultepec, it was fully understood that I was to come out alive and well. So it was at Buena Vista and at every other fight I was ever engaged in. Nevertheless there was always the chance that a bullet might change the programme. So it is now. Before going into those battles I always called some friends about me and told them what I wanted done in case of my death. In the same spirit I invoke your assistance now. No, not quite in the same spirit, for Dr. Tazewell tells me I am likely to live on indefinitely, now that he has succeeded in expelling the gout from my system. The real trouble is that even though I live, I shall not be able to attend to business, and there is a deal of business to be attended to. I must rely upon you to act for me."

Here surely was an awkward situation. Phil Shenstone had already begun the packing

of his trunks against the time of his departure for the West. His duty to his uncle seemed to forbid that departure altogether. But there was no real and necessary reason for his going West, while there was every reason of affection and loyalty for his staying to assume the responsibilities which his uncle felt it necessary to resign.

For many days he spent long hours in Colonel Shenstone's room, going over papers and mastering details, and so far acquainting himself with the old lawyer's business that he might manage it for him.

To Valorie he said:

"My uncle has need of me. I find I must give up my plan of going back to the West."

"I am glad of that!" she answered. Then, in maidenly fear that she might be misunderstood, she added:

"I'm glad you are going to take a load off Uncle Butler's mind."

XIX

THERE were certain points of honor insisted upon by many gentlemen of Virginia, with relentless purpose. Among these was the obligation of every man to report the fact when he had offered marriage to a young woman and she had rejected him. So when Greg Tazewell told his elderly half-brother, Dr. Hare, that he had offered his love to Valorie Page, and that she had declined his suit, the news spread rapidly. Dr. Hare regarded himself as specially commissioned by his half-brother to report it, and, having nothing else in particular to do, he mounted his horse and rode from one plantation to another to tell of the event. When Tazewell reproached him for his breach of confidence, his reply was ready.

"Every young woman," he said, "has a right to count the scalps hung to her girdle.

When you told me of this thing in strict confidence I justly assumed that you intended me to spread the news and spare you the embarrassment of doing so. I have fulfilled my duty in right brotherly fashion. What more do you ask?"

Tazewell bowed to the dictum and after a moment Dr. Hare said:

"How long do you intend to wait before addressing her again?"

"I have no thought of addressing her again," said the young man, sadly.

"Not address her again? Why not? Surely *you* are not going to flunk?"

"There is no question of flunking involved. My conversation with her was entirely serious and she begged me not to distress her by recurring to the subject, assuring me that her answer was final. It would be an affront to her for me to address her again."

"I can't see that. Our Virginia girls have a proper pride of their own. They always reject a first offer on principle. To do otherwise would be to cheapen themselves. They have a right to know that a man is in earnest be-

fore accepting him. If he takes the first 'no' for an answer they know that he was only trifling, or that his proffer was prompted by some momentary impulse, and so if he does not address them a second time they think themselves well rid of him. Why your sister Sally rejected me seven times in one week, and now she is the mother of my six children and a very happy woman."

"I do not doubt your knowledge of our Virginia girls," answered the other, "but Valorie Page is not a Virginia girl except by inheritance."

"That's true. I hadn't thought of that. By the way have you inquired who she is? One ought always to know all about a young woman before offering to make her his wife and the mother of his children."

"She is Colonel Butler Shenstone's adopted daughter," answered Greg, "and I fancy he would make things exceedingly uncomfortable for any young man who should suggest that that is not sufficient."

"I really suppose he would — particularly if he happened to have a fit of the gout on at

the time of the inquiry. Still, I strongly advise you to court the young woman again. It is the usual thing."

"I know it is, but she is a very unusual young woman."

"My dear Greg, every man thinks that about the woman he is in love with, but after all they are very much alike, and you really ought to marry. With your plantation and your practice and your outside reputation, you are everywhere regarded as a particularly good catch. Your sister Sally says you've only to back into a corner full of bonnets and take one at random, in full assurance that its owner will consent."

"On the whole," answered Greg with that scientific deliberation of utterance that always specially irritated his elderly but still enthusiastic half-brother, "on the whole I cherish a more exalted opinion of what you call 'our Virginia girls,' and of womanhood generally than my good sister-in-law, your wife, does."

With that he sprang into his saddle and galloped away. If there was any woman of his

acquaintance whom he was strongly tempted to except from his general deference to womanhood, it was this same sister-in-law, Sally. He knew her well as a merciless and utterly conscienceless gossip, in so far as she was permitted to indulge her propensities in that way. For in Virginia at that time, women disposed to gossip had their tongues held in leash by the customs of the country, exercising their restraining influence in two ways and from two sources of authority. In the first place, all the stately dames of that time, who by virtue of their lineage, their social position and their characters, were vested with social authority — all such frowned with the utmost severity upon every suggestion of gossip. In the second place, in that time and country every woman knew that her nearest male relative, husband, brother, father or what not, was held responsible for every word or act of hers, and the knowledge was a powerfully deterrent influence in restraint of gossip.

Nevertheless this sister-in-law of his managed often to insinuate spiteful things that she dared not say, and twice her husband had

been brought into sore trouble by the wagging of her tongue.

Greg knew that her husband would tell her of what he had said, and that she would seek sly revenge. Under the circumstances it would be very easy indeed for her to put him into a painfully false position. She need say nothing. She need only ask questions. She might profess a peculiar admiration and affection for Valorie, and then ask questions which nobody could answer regarding her birth, parentage and previous history, and the worst of it was that as everybody knew of her rejection of his suit, everybody would regard his sister-in-law's malevolence as a thing inspired by himself.

Everybody knew of it, that is to say, except Phil Shenstone. He knew nothing either of the courtship or of the rejection. The very last place to which news of these things was likely to penetrate, was Colonel Shenstone's chamber, and for the present, Phil was shut up there going over papers and making minute memoranda, during nearly all his waking hours. Early in the mornings he rode with

Valorie, after seeing the plantation animals fed, and in the evenings he sat before the fire in the parlor while she softly played upon the harp, the piano or the violin, with the gentle purpose of resting him. But during all the working hours of the day his attention was concentrated upon affairs, and as no company came to Woodlands during Colonel Shenstone's convalescence, Phil Shenstone heard not one word of his friend's proposal to Valorie or of her rejection of his suit. He still believed those two in love, and his conviction was confirmed by their prolonged conferences. How was he to know that these had for their subject the care of Colonel Shenstone?

Then suddenly an event occurred in San Francisco which completely changed conditions at Woodlands, so complexly interlocked are human affairs in this modern time. The California banking house of Adams & Co., failed.

That house had banking and other relations with financial institutions throughout the country, and especially its members were proprietors also of the one great express com-

pany then doing business throughout the land.

The failure of Adams & Co. quickly involved other failures in New York, Philadelphia and all others of the financial centres which then loosely controlled the business of the continent.

Circumstances were ripe for such a panic as the country had never before known or dreamed of. The development of the West had involved an extension of credit, restrained neither by any adequate governmental supervision nor by any concerted programme of prudence. Worse still, there was no trustworthy currency of any kind in the country except the utterly inadequate supply of gold and silver coin, a large proportion of which consisted of badly worn Spanish and French silver pieces. Every state had its own "wild cat" banking laws, under which banks with a capital of ten or twenty thousand dollars might and did issue circulating notes to the extent of millions each, secured, as a wit said at the time, by nothing more substantial than the pledge of the cashiers' boots.

These banknotes, crowding the new Cali-

fornian and Australian gold out of use, as bad money always does with good money, constituted the circulating medium of the entire country, and when the panic came they almost instantly lost such value as they had ever had. Manufacturing and commercial houses were suddenly obliged to stop business. Men and women by scores and hundreds of thousands, were thrown out of employment. The little dealers with whom such were accustomed to trade, were forced into insolvency. The great merchants, from whom these small dealers were accustomed to buy, found themselves without a market for their goods, and in their turn made assignments.

Chaos was come again.

Hurried telegrams, in such numbers as had never been known in that countryside before, came clamorously to Phil Shenstone from his partners in the West. Most of these messages were so badly "bulled" in transmission — for the art of the telegrapher was in its infancy then — that he could make little out of them. But this much they made clear to his mind, that things with his steamboat partner-

ship were in an exceedingly bad way, and that unless he should hurry west to take charge of affairs there was no knowing what might happen — but that whatever it might be, it must be disastrous.

To Phil Shenstone the worst of the situation was that everything Valorie's father had left in his charge for her was invested in these steamboat enterprises of his.

Hurriedly throwing a few suits of clothing into a trunk, he left by the next train to make the tedious journey to the West. How tedious a journey it was in those days, when every little railroad was operated independently of every other, it is difficult for one born in a later generation to conceive. He must take a train to Richmond. There, after a wait of several hours, he must take a pottering train to Fredericksburg. There he must change to a train that ran to Acquia creek on the Potomac, seven miles away. There he must take steamboat for Washington. In the capital city a preposterously long omnibus, with only two or three passengers in it, would convey him across town to the station of the Balti-

more and Ohio branch line, leading to the Relay House. At that point he must wait five hours for a train out of Baltimore for the West. This train would take him very slowly and with numberless stops, to Wheeling, or rather to a point four miles further down the Ohio River. A ferryboat took him across the stream, to Belleair, and after a wait of an hour or two, he could board a train for Newark, Ohio. There he had to change cars again for Columbus, thirty miles or so away. If he had been fortunate enough to arrive at Columbus on time he might have gone on to Cincinnati without delay. But, being two hours behind time — a very moderate lateness in those days — he must wait until midnight for the next train over the Little Miami railroad, whose boast it was that it ran two trains each way every twenty-four hours instead of the one that was usual on most other railroads. The Little Miami was a conspicuous model of enterprise.

At Cincinnati Phil Shenstone found his partners awaiting him, and, finding that one of their steamboats was leaving that day for St.

Louis, the party boarded her for uninterrupted consultation during the trip.

"Precisely what is the situation?" Phil Shenstone asked, when the group assembled in the Texas cabin where there was privacy.

"Well," answered Budd Doble, "the last three trips of our boats from Cincinnati to St. Louis have netted a loss."

"How so?"

"Bad money," was the response.

"But if the money had been good?" asked Phil.

"There would have been a profit of several thousand dollars on each trip."

Doble answered thus sententiously because he understood Phil Shenstone's temper and his methods in business.

"Very well. What have you done?"

"We've laid up seven of our boats."

"How much money are they making? I never knew a steamboat to make any money while tied up to the bank, but perhaps this is an exceptional case."

"Neither did I," said John Cannon, and Tom Leathers echoed the sentiment.

"But," began Budd Doble,—

"But what?" asked Shenstone.

"There's no money in carrying freight and passengers for worthless shinplasters."

"Of course not. But thanks to California and Australia, there's enough gold in the country to go round. Silver is out of it. All the silver dollars have been melted down because each of them was worth more than a dollar as mere metal. We'll carry freight and passengers for gold and for nothing else except the notes of the Northern Bank of Kentucky and a few other sound concerns. We'll post notices to that effect and stick to it. Now I had six hours in Cincinnati before I met you fellows, and I made use of them. I find the panic has rather stimulated emigration than checked it. I learn too that a new tide of emigration has set in from the South by way of Louisville. What are our competitors of the Louisville & St. Louis line doing to meet the opportunity?"

"They have laid up all their boats but two — just enough to fufill the minimum requirements of their mail contract."

"Good! We'll buy their boats and set them at work. That mail contract alone will pay operating expenses. This is a great opportunity. We'll have every wheel turning out gold within twelve hours after this boat reaches Louisville, and within twenty-four hours we'll buy every boat the other fellows own."

Thus with the energy that had accumulated during his period of rest, Phil Shenstone set his business going, with results so profitable as to justify even his optimistic confidence. He made the trip to St. Louis, and thence to New Orleans. There he selected five or six of their smaller steamboats and sent them up the Yazoo and the bayous, loaded with plantation supplies for sale and prepared to bring out the cotton that was piled high upon the banks awaiting a market.

It was late in January when he began to feel that he had the business in proper shape again. He had no thought of returning to Virginia. His uncle needed him of course, but there were personal considerations to be reckoned with. He was sure that Greg Tazewell had won the

love of Valorie Page, and so far as he could he believed that he wished to rejoice in the fact. But it was far easier to persuade himself that he did rejoice in it, when every day was a busy one with him than it would be if he should return to Woodlands to be a daily witness to the disappointment of the only hope he had ever cherished with all his heart.

He resolved to remain in the West, to extend his enterprises in every possible direction, to build and buy additional steamboats and keep them all busy making money that he did not want; to "smoke the trees of every navigable stream in the South," he said, in search of cotton bales that were hungry for a market; to push his prows into every Indian-haunted waterway that flowed from the Rocky Mountains into the Missouri river, and up every tributary of the great Mississippi river system that offered anything deeper than a dew for purposes of navigation.

He had no money need to stimulate these desires. There was impulse enough in his longing for ceaseless occupation and for the

forgetfulness that occupation brings to a mind perturbed.

But in the midst of all this there came to him a telegram from Greg Tazewell saying:

"The danger to Valorie has come. Your presence is imperative."

He took the next train for the East.

XX

THE "hard times" that followed the great panic of 1857, were such as had never been known before, and such as have never been known since, thank God! The poor were absolutely helpless. It was not only that all industries were stopped, so that wages were nowhere to be earned; that was indeed the smallest part of the distress. More than two-thirds of all the circulating money of the country had been extinguished. The little savings of the poor were so much valueless paper. But worse still, in the absence of an adequate circulating medium, the price of everything went up enormously — the price of everything, that is to say, except labor. That sank to nothingness.

The only laboring population in the land that did not severely suffer in that time was the slave population of the South. To them hard

times meant nothing. Come what might, they were fed and clothed and housed, doctored when they were ill and cared for in infancy and old age as no other laboring population ever was since the foundations of the world were laid. Yet this fact has never been accounted unto the slave owners of the South for righteousness, and it is a shame to the rest of the world that it has not been recognized at its worth.

Nobody is disposed nowadays to apologize for African slavery in the South, or to regret its extermination. Nobody rejoices in its abolition more sincerely than do the men and women of the South. But the fact remains, to the credit of those men and women of the South, that there never was on earth a laboring population so well paid or so happy as the negroes were. From infancy to old age they were secure of plenty to eat, plenty to wear, and a good roof over their heads, with medical attendance and the gentlest of nursing in the event of illness. Whatever of distress and terror hard times might bring upon laborers elsewhere, the negro on a Virginia plantation

had no occasion to share. There was meat in the smokehouse and corn in the crib, and if these fell short, the master's credit would supply the need.

But Richmond had a population of much poorer sort — white men, white women and white children, who were dependent upon daily wages for daily sustenance, as under freedom scores of thousands of negroes are to-day, whose fathers and grandfathers under the old patriarchal system never in their lives knew what it was to wonder where the next meal was to come from.

In Richmond, in the hard winter of 1857–8, the suffering among the poor was great and many things were done by generous men and women to alleviate it.

Prominently active among these ministers of mercy, was a gracious gentlewoman, Mrs. Albemarle. Her wealth was by no means great, but her social position was supreme. With compassionate thought she decided that she would make of her social dominance a ministry to the poor. It was her custom to give all sorts of entertainments and functions

in the parlors of her spacious home. For this year, she announced to all her friends, she would give no entertainment of any kind that was not tributary to the needs of those who suffered by reason of the hard times. She would entertain even more lavishly than before, but those who enjoyed her hospitality must pay for it in tribute to those in need. If she gave a little dance every man invited to it must pay a fair price for himself and an equal price for each lady he might ask to have invited with him. Success in this way encouraged the gracious gentlewoman to a still larger activity. She decided — as her three large parlors, opening into each other, afforded an ample auditorium — to give some amateur theatricals in the cause of charity. She was a wise dame, informed to her finger tips as to human vanity, and in so good a cause she was willing to play upon it. She knew scores of young people who wanted to appear upon the stage as amateur actors. Very well. A small contribution to the charitable fund would secure a part for any young man or young woman who might demonstrate ability to ren-

der the part well — but to no others. Mrs. Albemarle was determined that her guests should have their money's worth and that her "dramatics" should be altogether capable in their rendering. Guests were admitted only upon invitation and invitations were open only to those who were socially eligible. But each guest was expected to contribute substantially to the compassionate purpose with which the entertainment was given.

As the glory of being Mrs. Albemarle's guest on this conspicuous occasion was coveted as a thing of vital moment to every one who aspired to social recognition, the filling of her three great parlors was so certain in advance that its perplexing details had need to trouble no one except the young girls whom she had pressed into service for the occasion.

Woodlands lay within a dozen or fifteen miles of Richmond, and Mrs. Albemarle held it to be well within her jurisdiction. She had entertained Valorie as a guest on more than one previous occasion, and she knew of the girl's superb accomplishments as a musician. With shrewd foresight she enlisted Valorie as

one of the chief of her coadjutors in the charitable enterprise. Valorie not only promised to play on the occasion, in a letter, enclosing Colonel Shenstone's check for a hundred dollars in aid of the fund, without mentioning it, but she offered also to help in drilling the others, a function for which she was peculiarly equipped because of the unusual sort of training she had received at the convent — of which more anon.

For two weeks before the performance, Valorie lived at Mrs. Albemarle's, Colonel Shenstone's health being now restored. There was present a stage manager whom Mrs. Albemarle had hired from Kunkel & Moxley's Richmond Theatre, on the corner of Seventh and Broad streets, and also the *premier danseuse* of the theatre, Miss Jennie Hight, whose father was at once scenic artist and low comedian in that establishment. In those days every "provincial" theatre maintained a very capable stock company, a company so complete and so able that it could by itself present plays of every kind from tragedy to farce. It was the custom to employ as "stars" all the great actors

in the land each for a week or two weeks, as the case might be. The stock company was expected to "support" the star in any and every play included in his or her repertoire. The theatre maintained a scenic artist of its own, who also had a playing part in the company. He was expected to produce all needed scenery for each star's repertoire and to appear as an actor in each piece. Every theatre also maintained a stage carpenter and a costumer of its own and these also were actors who must fill parts when necessary.

It was the custom in those days to begin early and give two or three plays of an evening — usually a tragedy or a romantic drama, followed by a three or four-act comedy, with a roaring farce to complete the entertainment. The highest price of admission, authorizing one to take the best seat he could find unoccupied, was half a dollar, and it was the conscientious endeavor of the management to give the audience its money's worth. Therefore in addition to the three plays, the chief ones acted by such "stars" as Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, J. S. Clark, Maggie Mitchell, Fanny

Morant, Laura Keene, and their like, there was always a dance and often a song between the several plays, and sometimes also between the acts of the principal plays. By way of providing for this, every theatre that accounted itself of the first class, maintained a *premiere danseuse* of real gifts and a well trained ballet, the members of which rendered themselves additionally useful by coming on the stage as peasants or populace or what not, when the exigencies of a play required such presence.

Old Joe Hight was scenic artist and low comedian at Kunkel & Moxley's. His daughter Jennie was *premiere danseuse.*

Mrs. Albemarle, who did nothing by halves, had engaged Jennie Hight to dance a *pas seul* at her entertainment, so timing it that the girl might drive from the theatre after her first performance there and drive back again in time for the next.

There were morning rehearsals, of course. Otherwise the young student from Richmond College, who had undertaken the leading rôle in an act from "Richard Third," and with great impartiality, the leading rôle in an act

from "School for Scandal," besides a part in "Good for Nothing Nan," would never have been able to teach the other volunteers of the company how to speak their lines.

At these rehearsals, Valorie, who knew far more about music than the orchestra leader did, devoted herself mainly to the work of getting the music into fit condition. She gave a new orchestration to many of the numbers, and diligently drilled the performers in the proper rendering of their scores.

Her own personal part in the performance was to be the rendering of some obligatos on the harp, violin and piano, but in her loyalty to Mrs. Albemarle — and her still greater loyalty to art — she did what she could to bring every part of the performance to perfection. When at rehearsal, Jennie Hight went through with her *pas seul,* Valorie detected flaws in it. In the course of the peculiar training given to her in the convent with an ulterior purpose, she had been drilled in this particular *pas seul* until she was ankle perfect and toe perfect in every step of it. Jennie Hight's rendering was imperfect at many

points, and, with an eye single to the success of Mrs. Albemarle's entertainment, Valorie went to Jennie's rather unlovely quarters day after day to instruct her.

On the evening of the entertainment Jennie Hight arrived on time and proceeded hastily to don her dancing costume, which by Mrs. Albemarle's direction, had been so far lengthened as to its skirts as to reach nearly to her ankles.

While she was dressing, however, there came a hurried messenger from the theatre, bearing the news that old Joe Hight had fallen from the flies, where he had been arranging scenic effects, and had sustained injuries that were believed to be fatal.

Jennie had no other relative in all the world than this old father of hers, and her devotion to him was absolute. She instantly began stripping off her dancing costume, while the stage manager tore his hair and bewailed the necessity he was under of going before the curtain, calling off the dance and dampening the enthusiasm of the audience by announcing the tragic mishap.

"Don't do it!" said Valorie. "Don't say anything at all to the audience. With a little pinning I can wear Miss Hight's costume, and I will dance the *pas seul.*"

Without waiting for a word of reply, she caressed the danseuse saying: "I'm so sorry, Jennie! I'll call early in the morning," and proceeded hurriedly to don the dancing clothes.

There was a little delay, over which the audience grew somewhat impatient. But, after a brief while the curtain went up and without a word of explanation Valorie Page floated out upon the stage and rendered the *pas seul* in a fashion far more graceful than any that Jenny Hight could have given to it. Especially in the toe walking part of it, the girl excelled anything the audience had ever seen. Her dancing master at the convent had discovered what he called "genius in her ankles," and had made the most of it by persistent drilling.

The dancing excited the wildest enthusiasm. But that was by no means all of it. It was

Jennie Hight that the company had expected to see and it was not Jennie Hight who appeared. Those of the company who were accustomed to attend the theatre knew Jennie Hight's gifts and better still they knew her limitations. She was a good *danseuse,* but by no means a great one. The *danseuse* on the stage was a great one in the fullest sense of the term, and her greatness was emphasized by the fact that her dancing was done without the adventitious aid of excessively abbreviated skirts. To the theatre goers it was a revelation that a woman modestly attired with skirts hanging to the level of her shoe tops, could put even more of the poetry of motion into a *pas seul* than could the professional *danseuse,* with knees exposed and an array of flummery above the knees.

There were many in the audience who had conscientious scruples about attending the theatre, and these had rejoiced in an opportunity to see a professional *danseuse* without offending pastors and masters by entering the portals of a playhouse. These were disap-

pointed when they discovered that the dancer was not the "professional" whom they had come to see but an amateur.

It had been Valorie's confident expectation that when she appeared in Jennie Hight's costume to do Jennie Hight's dance, she would be taken for Jennie Hight. But Jennie had straight and intensely black hair, with a white skin and small glittering eyes; while Valorie had brown hair with much of curl in it, and large, deep blue eyes, the blueness of which was in no wise disguised by the length of her copper-colored eyelashes. So instantly the habitual theatre-goers discovered the substitution, and knowledge of it quickly spread among the rest.

At the end of the dance there was clamorous applause, but there were also a few distinct hisses of disapprobation. These were intended to express disapproval — an entirely unreasoning and unreasonable disapproval, but a disapproval none the less pronounced on that account — of the appearance of a gentlewoman in such a part under any conceivable circumstances. Not that the persons who

hissed could have offered any rational argument in condemnation of what had been done — for they could not — but merely that their absurd and illogical sense of social propriety was offended. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that their desire to pose as the exclusive and conspicuous guardians of propriety prompted them to condemnation without any thinking at all.

But the hisses, few as they were acted like a match to gunpowder. Those who admired and applauded were ten to one in numbers and fifty to one superior in social influence. They accepted the hissing as a challenge to themselves and they met it as such. They redoubled their acclaim and refused to abate their demonstration of approval. Three times the stage manager tried to raise the curtain on the next number of the programme and three times he was compelled by the clamor to lower it again. He took Valorie's hand and led her out before the curtain to make her bow of acknowledgment and on every occasion of the kind the audience refused to be satisfied. The excited guests were determined to make

their demonstration of approval complete and overwhelming. Without fear even of Mrs. Albemarle herself, they cried *encore, encore, encore,* until the stage manager saw no escape. Hastily stripping the stage of its furnishings for another number, and dumping a throne and two showcases of crown jewels into the wings, he ordered the orchestra to play the dance music again, saying earnestly to Valorie:

"You must give it again. You must. You must. Otherwise they'll mob us."

The unkindly hisses had brought tears to Valorie's eyes, but she angrily brushed them away and still more angrily made up her mind to do the dance with more than ever of that abandon which makes the fortune of such a performance. When, near the end of it, she came to the part where she must glide forward to the footlights upon the extreme points of her steel-tipped toes, there were two or three hisses heard, and a new impulse seized upon the girl. Putting all of resolution that she possessed into those eloquent ankles of hers and, with severe muscular effort, standing still upon the

extreme points of her dancing shoes, she broke forth in an address to the audience.

"Miss Hight's father is dying," she said. "She had to go to him, and could not give the dance. I have given it in her stead in order that the audience might not lose it. If I have done wrong I am sorry, but —" at that moment the applause broke out more violently than ever, because Mrs. Albemarle had hurriedly made her way to the back and had come to the footlights to stand by Valorie's side and to lend to her the countenance and support of the grandest dame in Richmond society. Her presence was not only a rebuke to those who had hissed; it was a positively explosive stimulus to those who were applauding, and the walls shook in echo to their vociferation.

With muscles strained to the point of breaking, Valorie, still standing upon her tiptoes, bowed and, with a supreme effort, tiptoed to the wings and disappeared. Colonel Shenstone, fearing consequences, had hurriedly sent Greg Tazewell to the exit and it was into his arms that she fell exhausted and fainting when the ordeal was over.

When quiet was restored the queenly figure of Mrs. Albemarle, with head erect and with restrained but manifest indignation flashing from her eyes, walked to the footlights and stood there in awe-inspiring silence for a space. At last she said:

"Certain persons in the audience, invited guests of mine, have seen fit to hiss a performance most generously given in an emergency by a young lady whom I hold in tender affection and the very highest esteem. I shall take it as a favor if every one who did so will have the courage to notify me of the fact. It is my purpose to revise my visiting list, and I wish to strike from it the names of all those who have been guilty of this monstrous affront to my hospitality."

The utterance fell like a bombshell. It was instantly followed by an outbreak of applause. Three or four of the most conspicuous hissers, feeling certain that Mrs. Albemarle already knew of their guilt, had the grace to retire without seeking to take leave of their hostess. The rest remained, trying to look innocent; for as everybody in Richmond knew, to be in

Mrs. Albemarle's bad books, was to be socially non-existent in the capital city of the commonwealth. But the glances of recognition and rebuke which others shot at them were quite sufficient for the affronted hostess's purpose. Before she quitted her place in front of the footlights she had a complete catalogue in her mind of those whom she intended on the morrow to banish from society in punishment of their sin.

XXI

VALORIE was not a young woman of the habitually fainting sort, but her nerves were unstrung, her muscular power exhausted, and her strength gone for the moment. Almost instantly she revived — the more quickly perhaps because she had fallen into Greg Tazewell's arms, and for reasons of her own she did not wish to rest there. The duration of a fainting period is often determined by considerations of that kind.

When she freed herself and stood erect she said:

"I have nothing else to do on the stage, I think. Mrs. Albemarle, may I —"

"Yes, dear, you may go to bed at once. Here Mary," to a negro maid in attendance, "take your Miss Valorie to her room."

At that moment some foolishly considerate person brought the girl a bottle of champagne

and begged her to swallow a glass of it. She refused, and Greg Tazewell emphasized her refusal.

"She doesn't want that," he said, in the peremptory tone that the physician has sometimes to adopt. "Take it away. Mrs. Albemarle, will you kindly direct that a hot bath — as hot as she can stand — shall be prepared for Miss Page, and that after your maids shall have got her into night robes she shall walk slowly twenty-one times around her room, keeping the count for herself? By that time her bath will be ready, and after it she must go instantly to bed."

"Wait a moment, Doctor," said Valorie. "I want you to go to Jennie Hight as quickly as you can. Find out how badly her father is hurt; do everything you can for him and then come back here, please, or send me word. I shall not sleep till I hear your report of him."

Tazewell set out at once upon this mission. As he was leaving, Mrs. Albemarle asked:

"Is it necessary to count those rounds of her room exactly? I don't quite understand."

"My dear Mrs. Albemarle," he replied, "neither the bath nor the counting of the rounds is of any consequence whatever — in itself. My purpose is simply to divert her mind to other than exciting thoughts, so that she may sleep. If you think of any other device in aid of such diversion of her mind, pray order it and you have my full authority to say I directed you to do so. Challenge her ability to count a thousand backward. Insist that she can't repeat the Lord's prayer. Raise a doubt as to her ability to conjugate a French verb. Do anything and everything you can think of to divert her mind from the events of the evening. Within half an hour I shall come back telling her that Joe Hight's injuries are very slight and that Jennie is asleep."

"But suppose you don't find that to be the case?"

"Then I shall lie like a gentleman, for the sake of her sleep, and it will be time enough to take it all back after she wakes."

Mrs. Albemarle looked curiously at him. After a moment she said:

"It will be a very long time before I strike the name of Greg Tazewell off my visiting list."

"I sincerely hope so," he replied, as he buttoned his overcoat and passed out of the door.

Half an hour later he returned and to Mrs. Albemarle he said:

"Fortunately, there is no occasion to lie, either like a gentleman or like a pickpocket. Joe Hight's arm is broken in one of its bones, but it has been very skillfully set by a young doctor. He has sustained no other injuries of the smallest consequence. So you can bid your patient sleep at ease. Has she had her bath?"

"She is just coming out of it."

"Very well. Get her to bed quickly. Don't let anybody give her champagne or any other fool thing of that exciting kind. Keep her mind off the events of the evening, and let her sleep as long as she can. With your permission I will wait in the 'banquet hall deserted' until you can report that she sleeps."

"No, you must go into Jack's — I mean

Judge Albemarle's—snuggery instead. There's an open wood fire there and pipes and tobacco. I'll come to you when she sleeps."

The doctor's devices for the diversion of the girl's mind proved successful. Her strength had been taxed to the verge of exhaustion, and when she heard the good news as to Joe Hight's condition, the soothing influence of the hot bath quickly sent her to sleep.

Mrs. Albemarle reported the fact to Greg Tazewell, and he promptly took his leave.

When he reached his room at the Exchange Hotel and Ballard House, a little before two o'clock in the morning, he found Colonel Shenstone awaiting him there, in as much of anxiety as the brave old soldier and lawyer of forty years' practice could be expected to feel in any imaginable circumstances. As an old soldier he had an abiding faith in the "fighting chance," whatever odds there might be against him. As an old lawyer he justly regarded himself as a man equipped to meet every legal proceeding with an objection that must at least secure delay.

Nevertheless he was uneasy, and to Tazewell he opened his mind.

"I received a note this evening," he said, "from a firm of lawyers whom I know, but whom I do not recognize as acquaintances. They are rascals altogether, but very shrewd rascals, capable of giving honest people a lot of trouble."

"What do they want?" asked Tazewell, whose diagnostic impulse was always dominant. When he should know what was the matter he would be prepared to consider the question of treatment.

"They want Valorie," answered the old gentleman, "and they want her for no good purpose."

"What do you mean? Tell me all about it. Is it a case for shotguns?"

"At present, no. It may become that later. I do not know."

"If it does, of course —"

"Oh, of course. I know your shotgun will be ready and in quick hands. But at present it is a case of law and I suspect of blackmail."

"Tell me, please."

"I will. These people formally notify me that their client, a Mrs. Eulalie Lee, claims to be the mother of Valorie, and as such her natural guardian, until she shall reach the age of twenty-one years. They allege that Phil Shenstone kidnapped the girl from the convent in which her mother had placed her; and I really shouldn't wonder if he did; that she is now held in durance by me and that her mother demands her immediate surrender into her own keeping."

"Is the mother in Richmond or is she in New Orleans awaiting results?"

"I do not know. I suppose she is here. It makes no difference."

"Pardon me, I think it does. From certain things that Phil has let fall in conversation I imagine that the woman is a plain blackmailer, that her real purpose in this case is to extort money. Of course you could not in any way yield to a demand of that sort —"

"Of course not," interrupted the colonel.

"But I, who am in no way connected with the matter, might perhaps be able, with a check

of my own to persuade the lady to go back to New Orleans."

"Not a dollar! Not a cent! I'll fight the case to the Supreme Court of the United States if necessary, at my own expense, but the woman shall not have a dollar from you or anybody else. Listen, Greg! The only thing I fear is some summary proceeding like *habeas corpus*. If we can fight that off, we can keep the case in court for three years or more, and by that time Valorie will be either of age or married, and in either case her mother's claim will be extinguished. The great trouble is that Phil isn't here, and he has never told me all the facts. I need them as a ground upon which to proceed."

"I'll telegraph him to come. You may be sure he'll be here within three days. Can we stave off action that long — with legal proceedings or shotguns?"

"I think so. Unfortunately these rascals know that Valorie is at Mrs. Albemarle's, and may serve papers on her there."

"I'll take care of that," answered Tazewell. "Mrs. Albemarle's house, you know,

is isolated in large grounds of its own. When her last guest leaves each night her iron outer gates are locked, and she turns Castor and Pollux loose. They are her silently savage bull dogs. They can be implicitly trusted to see that nobody — though backed by the entire constabulary of the town — shall pass within that lofty iron fence during their tour of duty. As soon as they are locked up in the morning I will call upon Mrs. Albemarle and explain the situation. After that you may trust that sagacious and determined gentlewoman to protect Miss Page. The important thing now is that you shall go to bed. As your attending physician, I order that, peremptorily. Leave the rest to me."

As soon as the colonel retired, Tazewell drew on his overcoat, walked through the deserted highways to the office of the "Electro-Magnetic Telegraph," in Pearl Street, and roused the operator. There were no "branch stations" in those days, no district messengers, no arrangements of any kind by which one could send a telegram without personally visiting the office of the "Electro-Magnet-

ic Telegraph Company." Telegraphing was rather slow work, too, at that time. Every despatch had to be received on paper and laboriously repeated at every office through which it passed. The service was costly, and when Greg Tazewell ordered his telegram sent to the offices of Phil Shenstone's steamboat company in Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis and New Orleans — not knowing in which of those cities his friend might happen to be at that time,— the operator said:

"It'll spoil a ten-dollar gold piece to do all that, Doctor."

"Very well. Here is a twenty-dollar gold piece. If you will see to it that these messages go through to-night, and send me word at the Exchange Hotel and Ballard House that any one of them has been delivered, the change is yours. Otherwise I shall call for it in the morning. Do you like oysters? I'll send in a dozen or so and a pot of coffee from Zetelle's just to keep you awake till you get the messages off. But bear in mind, I expect to receive your report in the early morning that one or other of the messages has

been delivered into Mr. Shenstone's hands."

As a matter of fact, Dr. Tazewell was awakened before five o'clock by the telegraph operator bearing a despatch from Phil Shenstone in Cincinnati, which assured him that his friend was leaving on the first train and would be in Richmond within thirty-six hours.

Tazewell arose at once, dressed himself and without breakfast, went to Mrs. Albemarle's, where without hesitation he sent a message to her that robbed her of at least two hours' sleep.

When she appeared he briefly explained the situation, adding:

"I know nothing of legal processes, but I understand that our greatest danger lies in the possibility that some law officer or bailiff shall gain access to Miss Page and serve some sort of process upon her. Now I want to give you a physician's certificate —"

"It will not be necessary," answered the grand dame. "I know how to protect my house. I will see to it that no bailiff shall reach her even though he comes as Napoleon said of Madame de Staël, 'disguised as a woman.'"

"What will you do?"

"Send for my knights-errant, the Richmond College boys. They'll cut lectures and quizzes and everything else to serve me. I'll fill the place full of them. They'll break the neck of anybody who tries to force his way in. Of course I shall introduce all of them to Valorie as the damsel in distress whom they are to guard, and of course, they'll all fall madly in love with her. College boys always do that you know, and it is good for them. Leave all that to me, and I promise you and Colonel Shenstone that nobody shall get at Valorie while you await Phil's return. But you and he must let me know when the time is up, for I'm going to complete last night's work by giving a special reception to my friends 'to meet Miss Valorie Page, of Woodlands.' You're a doctor. You know how necessary it is, when administering a liniment, to 'rub it in.' I'm simply going to 'rub it in.'"

"Mrs. Albemarle, you are simply great!"

"Why do you persist in calling me Mrs. Albemarle? Why don't you call me 'Cousin Mattie?' You know your ever so many times

great-grandfather Adam, married my ever so many times great-grandmother, Eve, and so we are cousins. If you persist in ignoring the kinship, I shall quarrel with you, and I don't want to do that, because I like you, Greg Tazewell. Now you must run away. I haven't any breakfast for you because the cook got that champagne that you wouldn't let Valorie drink last night. It's your own fault, but I've no doubt you're responsible for many much greater sins, so I'll forgive you if you'll go away at once and leave me free to send my summons to the college boys. But you must come back to dinner at four o'clock. Good-bye. No excuses accepted. My word must be law. Go away."

Tazewell was glad enough to obey. He wanted a few additional hours of sleep, and he knew that Colonel Shenstone would be at his rooms pretty early in the morning to learn the result of his proceedings. Besides he hadn't had his bath as yet and was really not ready for his breakfast. And in addition to all this he was eager to tell Colonel Shen-

stone of Mrs. Albemarle's amusing idea of "rubbing it in," a thing he highly approved, both as a man of medicine and as a mere man.

It was Mrs. Albemarle's habit to do things in a way that secured the approval of those for whose approval she cared. She was a "thoroughbred" in the fullest significance of the term.

XXII

WHEN Colonel Shenstone appeared in Greg Tazewell's room early in the morning, the doctor was taking his breakfast there. It was not a customary thing in those days for hotel guests to take their meals in their rooms, and hotel proprietors did their best to prevent the introduction of the custom into American hotel life — a tendency which a universal reading of Dickens's novels strongly fostered. By way of checking it the hotel people printed on their bills of fare — the French word *menu* had not come into use then — and on the posted "rules of the house," a legend in conspicuous type, with two amputated human hands, pointing to its two ends, saying:

"☞ All meals served in rooms will be charged extra. ☜"

But Greg Tazewell was a young man who

had lived abroad, and had there learned something of the importance of comfort and leisure and quietude at meals, especially to a man who has been under wakefully emotional strain all night. More important still, he was a man who held money to be a mere tool, a means to an end, and as his own command of money — though he was not a very rich man — was comfortably adequate, he had no mind to be diverted from his comfort and quietude and leisure by the printed warnings or threats of his landlord.

So he had daringly ordered his breakfast served in the outer one of his two rooms, in front of a cannel coal fire which, he was also under warning, would be "charged extra."

"I hope you have not had your breakfast, Colonel?" said the young man.

"No. Not yet. I'm going down to it after I've had my talk with you."

"You're not going to do anything of the sort. You're going to have it with me, comfortably, in front of the fire," answered the younger man, rising from his chair, climbing over the divan and pulling the bell cord.

"Why bother to order more?" asked the old gentleman, scanning the table. "You have a goodly supply of beefsteak — let me share it."

"Peremptorily, no. You're limping again this morning. I forbid red meat. I'll order you a roe herring, or a piece of broiled shad — the fish have just swum into the river — or some broiled bacon and dry toast, but you simply must not eat beefsteak, if you are to be in condition to fight out this controversy."

"Why not let me fall ill? On your professional certificate we could stave those rascals off for a week or two — long enough at least to let Phil get here."

"Phil will be here within thirty-six hours. There is his telegram. As for 'staving off,' you may trust Mrs. Albemarle for that. She has undertaken the job, and you know that that gracious and altogether glorious lady bountiful is not accustomed to fail or falter in anything she undertakes. But just now you simply must not eat even an ounce of red meat."

"All right. I'll take toast and tea then,—

that's the regular diet I believe,— only I'll beg you to make it coffee instead of tea. Nobody but a hardened and confirmed Englishman could stand tea for breakfast. But now about Mrs. Albemarle. I've just sent her a note asking her to consider her present possession of Val as one adverse to me. That's a legal phrase. What it means is that she refuses to give Val up to me or in any way to recognize any right on my part to control her person or her movements, until such time as I shall have established my right by legal process. Do you understand?"

"I think I do. It means that Mrs. Albemarle shall hold possession of her as long as you think necessary so that you may reply '*non possumus*'— that's plural, but let it go — to any writ or paper that may be served upon you demanding her delivery."

"Precisely! Excellent! You'd have made a lawyer, Greg, if you hadn't been lured into another profession. Now just as soon as you and I part after breakfast, I'm going back to Woodlands. I have sent a note to those precious rascals, telling them that my office

as well as my residence is there, and that if they have any business with me, they must call upon me there. That will mean one day's delay, I suppose, or it would if they were gentlemen who used horses for traveling. As they are not, I suppose they'll come by rail, and if they take the half past ten train, this morning, confound it, they'll be there nearly as soon as I myself shall."

It proved to be so. Colonel Shenstone had just limped into the house and settled himself in an easy chair before the fire, when Mr. Stone, the senior partner of the opposing law firm, presented himself in the porch.

There were well-recognized distinctions and discriminations in Virginia hospitality in that stately and well-ordered old time. When the master of a mansion recognized a visitor as a gentleman, all the penetralia were freely thrown open to him. He was asked into parlor and dining room, and upon occasion, even into the sacred precincts of "the chamber." When one came on business whom the master of the mansion did not recognize as his social equal, the hospitality was more rigorously re-

stricted. If it were summer the stranger was received in the porch. If it were winter he was invited into the great hall, as was done in this instance.

"Seat him in the hall," Colonel Shenstone said to the servant, "and say that I will wait upon him presently."

The word "presently," in that case, meant at Colonel Shenstone's good pleasure, and it was fully ten minutes by the loudly ticking hall clock before the master appeared. When he did so, he said to his guest:

"Perhaps you'd like a dram after your six miles' drive from the station?"

"Thank you, yes. I'll drink with you."

"Not with me," answered the old gentleman. "I never take spirits. But my sideboard is hospitable of course to those who honor me by their visits. Henry, bring a decanter, a sugar bowl, and a flagon of water."

It was observable that Colonel Shenstone did not order pipes and tobacco. The dram was a matter of course to all comers in the Virginia of that time, even though the comer were only a negro from the fields, presenting him-

self to report that the chinch bug had appeared in the wheat. But the pipe was sacred to a more equal hospitality. It was never offered to any but guests accepted as gentlemen upon terms of equality.

Without that offer, therefore, Colonel Shenstone brought business to the fore by asking, with suave indifference:

"May I inquire to what I am indebted for your visit?"

"Certainly. We sent you a note, you remember —"

"Did you?"

"Yes. Surely you remember it. We demanded in behalf of our client, Mrs. Eulalie Lee, the surrender to her of her minor, or in legal phrase, 'infant' daughter, known at present as Valorie Page —"

"*Miss* Valorie Page, please."

"Yes, of course. You remember the terms of the note?"

"I remember nothing in this matter. Have you any proof of the contents of that alleged note, or any evidence going to show that I ever received it?"

"Why, I have your answer to it. Surely that is sufficient."

"Will you show it to me?"

The lawyer, utterly bewildered by Colonel Shenstone's attitude, drew the note from a pocketbook and handed it to its author. Colonel Shenstone polished his eyeglasses, and adjusted them to his nose. Then he read his own note to the lawyers, and said:

"I find no reference in this note to any antecedent communication from you or your firm. I find only this:

"'Dear Sirs: My residence is at Woodlands, and my office also is there. If you have occasion to discuss any matters of legal import with me, I must trouble you to call upon me there.'

"There is no reference to any communication from you, and, as the note bears no address except 'Dear Sirs,' there is absolutely nothing to show that it was addressed to your firm."

"But surely, Colonel Shenstone, you must admit —"

"I admit whatever is proved, and absolutely nothing else. Proceed if you please."

The man was discomfited, but he was a shrewd man of law, and he did not despair.

"Very well," he said. "I do not insist upon the fact that we have previously communicated with you. It is unimportant. I make the communication now. You have under your control one known as Valorie Page, the infant daughter of our client, Mrs. Eulalie Lee, and in her behalf we demand the instant surrender of the girl—"

"Why not say young lady?"

"Well, young lady, then. We demand the instant—"

"Whatever demands you make, I decline to accede to. But pray go on. You have made a number of unsupported statements. I suppose you have proof of them?"

"What, for instance?"

"Well, first that I have a young lady under my control. Have you any proof of that?"

"I supposed you would admit that as a notorious fact."

"In this case I am admitting nothing whatever. I do not admit the existence of the young lady. You must prove that. If there

is such a person I do not admit that I have her in possession or subject to my control. You must prove that. If there is any such person, which you must prove, I do not admit that she is an infant in law. You must prove that. If there is any such person, I do not admit that she is the daughter of your client — you must prove that. By the way, have you any warrant of attorney empowering you to act for your client?"

"You know, Colonel Shenstone, it is not customary —"

"I know nothing except what is proved. Have you any such warrant of attorney authorizing you to appear in behalf of this alleged client, and authorizing me to discuss matters with you as her attorney?"

"I assure you —"

"I did not ask for assurances. I asked for a legal document, in the absence of which I must decline to discuss this matter further."

"As a lawyer, and in view of the peculiar nature of this case," responded Stone, "I quite understand. But as a lawyer I want to say before leaving that if you could and would

abate somewhat the rigidity of your requirements as to proof and the like, I think you and I might arrange a settlement of the affair out of court, which would satisfy all parties concerned and avoid — what shall I call it — well, friction, controversy,— what you will. We might avoid litigation, which is always unpleasant and always expensive. It is the practice of our firm, Colonel Shenstone, to embrace every opportunity to settle things out of court. We have a fixed belief or conviction or whatever you choose to call it, that it is always better to compromise than to fight. It saves money, it spares tender sensibilities and —"

"And it leaves more for the lawyers to divide," interrupted Colonel Shenstone. "Perhaps that was not your thought. At any rate I may say this: I never respond to a proposal of whatever sort it may be, until I know definitely and minutely what its terms are. In the present instance I wish to emphasize the fact that I do not admit the existence of any case to be compromised. But as you insist that there is some such case and ask me to consider a proposal of compromise, I must ask

you to state definitely what your claims are and upon what terms you propose to compromise them."

"Thank you. That is what I want. Our client, as the mother —"

"Which I do not admit —" answered the colonel.

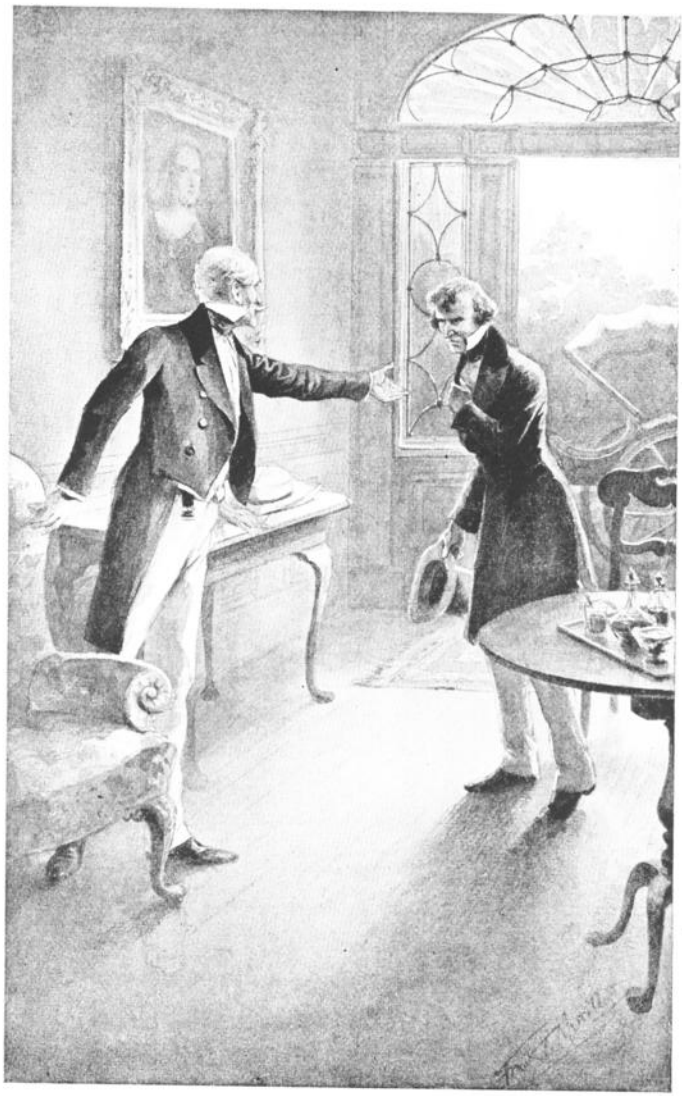
"Which you do not admit. Yes. I fully understand that. Well, then, our client, claiming to be the mother of a certain young woman —"

"Whose existence I do not admit."

"Whose existence you do not admit — we shall get on better, Colonel Shenstone, if we agree that you admit nothing, and let me go on."

"Very well. With the understanding that I admit none of your statements, affirmatively or negatively, by express words, or by silence, by affirmation or by implication — in brief that I reserve the right to dispute each and every one of them and to insist upon affirmative proof of each and all,— with that understanding you may proceed and I will not interrupt. Go on."

"Very well then, and thank you. Our client, claiming to be the mother, and as such, the natural custodian of a certain young lady, insists that she has an indefeasible right to the services of that young woman during her minority, or, as the law calls it, her 'infancy.' The mother contends that at great expense she has educated the young woman in a way that makes her services exceedingly valuable,—that she has had her expensively trained in certain arts of the stage, including music and dancing, which, if practised at her present age and aided by her beauty, her grace, and her other accomplishments, all of which have been cultivated at great expense to the mother, would yield a large return in the way of salaries and emoluments. She claims that you have possession of the girl and are restraining her from the earning of such salaries and emoluments, wherefore she demands either that you restore the girl to her keeping or that you pay her a sufficient sum by way of damages to compensate her for the loss of the girl's services. I think she would accept a very reasonable sum —"



"YOUR VEHICLE STANDS READY FOR YOU. GO! GO! GO!"
Page 223.

"Listen!" commanded Colonel Shenstone. "Go back to your client, and say to her that I will see her hanged before I will let her get possession of the young gentlewoman and before I will pay her the fraction of a cent by way of blackmail. Tell her I'll spend the last dollar of my fortune in fighting her iniquitous purpose, if she chooses to make that necessary, but that not one dollar will I consent to pay her in the way of forfeit. And let me tell you, young man, that you'd do well to look to your retainers' fees, for if there is aught of speculation in your acceptance of this iniquitous case, it shall be a losing speculation to the end of the chapter. Go now. It is war, you understand, and war with no quarter, no flags of truce, no negotiations, no anything but gunfire and bayonet charges. Your vehicle stands ready for you. Go! Go! Go!"

Old as Colonel Shenstone was, his manner was so vehement, so determined, so indignant, under what he deemed an insult, that the lawyer seriously feared violence at his hands. He paused not even for the formality of adieus, but literally fled down the footway to the

horse blocks, leaped into his hired vehicle, and put the horse to his paces in precipitate retreat.

When he had passed the outer gate, Colonel Shenstone withdrew into the house and wrote a letter which he sent by his body servant to Mrs. Albemarle, in Richmond.

It had its results, as it was intended to have.

XXIII

WHAT Colonel Shenstone wrote to Mrs. Albemarle was this:

"*You Obstinate Person:* If you persist long enough in your determination to hold a possession adverse to me, there will be only one course open to me, in case a writ is served upon me. I shall have to go into court and show that I am powerless to produce what the court calls upon me to produce. It is important that I shall be able to do that with a good conscience. I suppose your cantankerous obstinacy will make that not only possible but actual. You always were high-handed in your methods, even when you were my ward, and I know of no way in which to control you. Phil is due to arrive at the Exchange Hotel to-morrow afternoon or night. He has several times intimated to me that he has control of funds belonging to the Little

Minx. If she should have need of money, application must be made to him, for, under present circumstances I must not advance a penny to an errant and disobedient girl who has abandoned my protection and placed herself under that of an unruly antagonist. Under ordinary circumstances of course, my bank account would be as freely at her service as it will always be at Phil's, if ever he should need such service, which I regard as extremely unlikely."

In writing this letter, Colonel Shenstone was guided somewhat by his conviction that Mrs. Albemarle was a person of rather acute perceptions. It will be observed that the letter upon its face, bore no indication of the identity of the person to whom it was addressed. The words: "You obstinate person," might mean anybody, for who is there who does not seem an obstinate person now and then? It was Colonel Shenstone's lifelong habit to write his letters upon three pages of letter-sized paper, to fold them after the old fashion so as to bring the fourth side of the sheet outside for the address, and to use no

envelope. In this case he violated all the traditions and set all his customs at defiance. He searched Valorie's lap desk till he found an envelope. Then rather awkwardly — for he was unused to envelopes — he managed to fold his sheet into a wad that he could force into the receptacle. Then, after addressing the letter he wrote in the lower left hand corner of the envelope, these words:

"Please let my servant bring this envelope back to me so that I may know certainly that the letter has been delivered."

Mrs. Albemarle laughed a little as she read the letter, and she smiled as she wrote in reply:

"*You dear, unreasonable old bundle of law points:* I scorn to keep either your envelope, or the letter it held. I am returning both, far more neatly folded than when they came to me. If you think for one moment to bend me from my purpose by your persuasions or your threats, you will find yourself in error. I shall hold my adverse possession so adversely that even your legal acumen shall find no way of breaking through it. Do your worst, sir, and

you shall find my woman's wits not wanting in any match with your legal ones.

"By the way, I've a duel or two to prevent. My college boys all fell in love with V. of course. I knew they would, but I didn't think they would quarrel so fiercely. I'll settle all that, however. I've sent a personal note to each of them, peremptorily summoning each — without mentioning the others — to call upon me for a confidential conference at three o'clock to-day. When they come and each finds the others here, I'll laugh at them and we'll all go to dinner. I've ordered three kinds of dessert besides syllabub, and all boys like sweet things. It is one of the loveliest traits of their characters. It means that they haven't yet smoked enough to spoil their natural appetites or vitiate their tastes. I wish they all loved romantic novels, too, as all girls do. It would give one such a hold upon them, wouldn't it?"

Having sent off this missive, the Grand Dame — the charm of whose personality lay largely in the fact that she always knew what next to do — wrote out a card and sent it to

the engravers with a "hurry order." This is the way in which it read:

"Having decided to make a journey, Mrs. Albemarle finds it necessary to cancel all her invitations for Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays until further notice. Mrs. Albemarle regrets that for a time she must deny herself the society of her friends, and hopes soon to renew her invitations."

She did not send these cards out, but held them in reserve for use if needed. The next day she wrote a note to Phil Shenstone, who had just arrived at the Exchange Hotel.

"*My Dear Young Chevalier,*" she wrote; "I see by the list of Hotel arrivals that you are in Richmond. I must see you at once. It is important. Never mind hours or conventions, but come as soon as you can." Then in a postscript she added:

"P. S. Don't misinterpret the peremptory tone of this note. It doesn't mean that I want to scold you. It means on the contrary that I want to consult you about somebody who is dear to both of us, I think. Anyhow you are to come at once. That is both my request and

my command. Grant the one or obey the other as you choose, but come, and come quickly."

"What a wonderful woman she is, anyhow," exclaimed Phil, as he tossed the note to Greg Tazewell to read.

After reading it, Greg answered:

"Yes, she is quite all of that. What a pity it is that no man living has her brains, her tact, her readiness of resource, her extraordinary perceptions and her marvelous ability to make everybody do whatever she wants done! If that woman were a man she'd be President and Secretary of State and Prime Minister of England and dominant diplomatist of all the world — all in the same twenty-four hours. I wonder what she has on hand now? I'll bet golden guineas to gouber peas that she's planning something that will startle us by its originality and its genius."

"I won't take the bet," answered Phil, "because one doesn't care to lose even gouber peas on a wager. It humiliates one to lose a bet. But I'll go at once to see her."

Half an hour later he presented himself at

Mrs. Albemarle's, asking only for her, because he could not know what the situation might be, and because she had made no mention of Valorie in her note. He had reflected: "Mrs. Albemarle is not at all a haphazard person. Whatever she does or says is done or said with a thoroughly well-considered purpose; and equally what she omits to say or do is omitted with a well-considered purpose. So as she summoned me to meet herself, making no mention of Valorie, my safest course is to ask only for her."

"My dear Phil, I need not ask you how you are," said the gracious lady, taking both his hands as he approached and she advanced to meet him. "You look it — every bit of it — and I'm glad. But you'll naturally want to see Valorie, presently, and before that happens you and I have some business to attend to. Now you are not to ask me anything about my plans. They constitute an inviolable secret. But Colonel Shenstone has intimated to me that you may perhaps have some money in your hands to which Valorie has some sort of claim. Is it so?"

"Yes, certainly. Her father left me in charge of her affairs. He was a stockholder in several steamboat companies —"

"I don't care at all for the details, Phil, and you know I don't care for the money. But I'm just about ready to do something for Valorie which will cost some money and you know how proudly independent she is. She'll be sure presently to throw an obstruction in my way by wanting to know where the money comes from for her share of the expenses. So —"

"Pardon me for interrupting," said Phil, smiling, "but you are so transparent a creature, Mrs. Albemarle, that one doesn't need glasses to penetrate your purposes. I quite understand. I am prepared to place a considerable sum of money — Valorie's own money, really and absolutely her own — to her credit or yours, in any bank you may name. I'll do it to-day — within the hour."

"How stupid you men are!" answered she. "All I want is to quiet Valorie's absurd scruples. She and I may go traveling presently — mind you, I don't say we shall — and

we may even decide to make a little tour in Europe — mind you, again, I don't say we shall. But, just by way of quieting her scruples, I want you to get for her a letter of credit —"

"I see. I'll do it to-day. What else?"

"Only one other thing."

Going to her writing desk which stood behind the curtains of a deep bay window, she brought forth a little parcel, saying:

"Here is a box of gloves which you are to remember that you bought at Breedon & Fox's for her. Of course a *man* would go to Breedon & Fox's for gloves — a woman would prefer Price's. I'm going to send for her now and you are to give her the gloves, in my presence, mind, so that there shall be no unbecoming emotional trimmings to the procedure."

"But, Mrs, Albemarle," he exclaimed, staying her hand as she reached for the bell rope, "I cannot consent —"

"Oh, that's easily managed," she replied. "You mean you must really pay for the gloves if you are to give them to her? Very well. They cost fifteen dollars. You may discharge

the debt by sending me flowers to that amount if you must."

She had already pulled the bell cord — for Mrs. Albemarle's bell cords were placed within easy and convenient reach. It was one of her eccentricities to insist upon having them so, and the mechanics who arranged things about her house under her direction, had found her imperious will as resistless as men and women of higher social position had discovered it to be. The bell hanger whom she had compelled to place that silken cord conveniently by the side of the chimney piece, had been as powerless in his desire to hang it behind the tall clock or in rear of the antique Roman bookcase as Phil Shenstone now was to negative her will that he should give Valorie the box of gloves.

There was this redeeming feature about Mrs. Albemarle's exactions of obedience, that she always managed, in one way or in another, to make compliance agreeable. Thus in Phil Shenstone's case he had wanted to stop at the florist's that morning and take some flowers to Mrs. Albemarle. But he had reflected that

as he had been summoned to her presence, and had not already paid his respects voluntarily, it might seem something akin to an apology for him to bear a tribute of flowers on the occasion. Moreover, one of Mrs. Albemarle's college boys, a youth whose maintenance in college Phil Shenstone was surreptitiously bearing, had visited him promptly on his arrival, to tell him of the guardianship of Valorie in which he had assisted. Incidentally the young man told him that in gratitude to Mrs. Albemarle for her social recognition of himself, he had abstained from the buying of a cravat which he coveted, and had spent the money thus saved, in three Jaqueminot roses; that upon his presentation of them, Mrs. Albemarle had said:

"But, my dear Lucien, you mustn't spend your wealth upon me. Save it for younger and eligible women. It is nice of you of course, but I shall not allow it in future."

Then, the young fellow went on to relate as a curious coincidence, there had come to him, next day with Mrs. Albemarle's compliments, a classical dictionary which he had longed for,

and half a dozen cravats, such as he should never have dreamed of buying for himself.

On the whole the recital tended to restrain Phil Shenstone's impulse to carry flowers to Mrs. Albemarle, though, as he afterwards saw very clearly, her impulse in the case of the college boy, had been one in no wise applicable to himself. At any rate he was glad now of an excuse to send limitless flowers to the gracious woman who was doing so much for Valorie.

In answer to Mrs. Albemarle's summons, Valorie presently floated into the parlor. Phil Shenstone found it impossible to think of her entrance into a room otherwise than as floating. She had not known or suspected that he was there, or within five hundred miles of her. When she saw him all the reserve that belongs to the young gentlewoman went out of her, and all the candor of the child that remained to her came forth. She ran forward impulsively crying: "Oh, it's Mr. Phil! it's Mr. Phil!" and she was on the point of throwing her arms about his neck when she remembered something.

What it was, is no matter. When she remembered it she chastened her greeting into one of cordial friendship only.

"I'm glad she didn't kiss him," thought the wise woman who was looking on. "That would have meant that she didn't love him as I want her to do. It would have meant that she feels for him nothing more than the cold-blooded friendship to which she is now so diligently pretending. As she suddenly restrained herself and is now behaving in a singularly discreet manner, I know of course that she does love him, and I can afford to leave the result to Cupid. Phil Shenstone is stupid in such matters of course. All strong men are, and especially all men strong enough to be modest. But he'll wake up after awhile and find out what's what. That's the charm of men. Great, stupid, dull-witted fellows that they are, they never know when a woman is in love with them. They construe the plainest possible indications of it to mean something exactly the reverse. I dare say Phil Shenstone observed Valorie's impulse to kiss him, and saw the way in which she restrained it, and argued in his

own mind that it all meant she loved some other fellow, and mustn't caress him for fear of disloyalty or misconstruction or some other absurd thing of that sort. The stupidity of men is really very annoying at times; but at any rate it is amusing. Some day, when these two shall have found out what and how much they mean to each other, I'll have my laugh at them and explain to them how absurd their behavior in this present time seemed to me to be."

In the meanwhile, Phil Shenstone was putting his own construction upon Valorie's behavior. He had seen and understood her childlike impulse to rush into his arms and caress him. He had observed the suddenness with which she abandoned that purpose, and adopted a tone of cordial friendliness instead.

"In her gratitude to me," he argued, "for having rescued her from conventual restraints and from a repulsive life prospect, and for having brought her into a larger life which she intensely enjoys, the old, childish impulse to caress me was for the moment dominant. But she remembered that she is a young

woman now, with a personal dignity to maintain. More important still, she remembered that — well, she remembered Greg Tazewell, the one man who means all there is in the world to her.

"She is right, of course. He is fitter to make her happy than I am, and besides he has awakened her soul, as I never did and never could. It is better so. Greg and I are friends. I will take myself utterly out of his way. Whatever of gratitude and personal friendship Valorie may feel for me, must weigh nothing in the scale. As soon as this tangle in her affairs can be straightened out, I'll go back to my steamboating and leave the two to be happy.

"But I shall never love any other woman than Valorie Page so long as I live."

Then another thought entered his mind as if some Demon of Suggestion had thrust it there.

"If Valorie and Greg were married, these people would have no further claim upon her. She would be free. Why shouldn't they solve the riddle in that easy way?"

But somehow that thought troubled him so greatly that he dared not entertain it. He was one of two gentlemen of Virginia, and as such he would in the end do his duty, whatever personal distress it might cause him. But as one shrinks from the surgeon's knife even when he knows its use to be necessary, so, for the present, Phil Shenstone shrank from actively suggesting what seemed to be the only or at any rate the easiest way out of existing complications.

He gave Valorie the gloves, but he did it in a way that robbed the act of every particle of the significance Mrs. Albemarle had intended it to bear.

Then he went away and sent Mrs. Albemarle her flowers. Perhaps in her eyes he mended matters a trifle by sending Valorie at the same time a little bunch of forget-me-nots, which as Mrs. Albemarle delightedly observed, the girl cherished with special tenderness, throwing some gaudier blooms away to make place for them.

XXIV

AS he drove away from Woodlands, the lawyer, Stone, puzzled himself mightily and to no purpose. He could not make out the cause of Colonel Shenstone's indignant outbreak, for the reason that neither his thinking habit nor his moral perception lay within the same plane in which the old Virginian's thinking was done. Trained as the young man had been in that school of legal ethics which had found acceptance among the smaller men of the profession in many parts of the country, he could not understand how anything that lay within the limits of technical legality could be otherwise than proper. The proposal of compromise which he had suggested to the old Virginian had been carefully kept within those limits. He had made no threat of anything to be done in case of its non-acceptance. And yet Colonel Shen-

stone had angrily called it a threat of blackmail. Cudgel his brain as he might, Stone could remember no precedent, no decision, no *obiter dictum* even, upon which a court could so construe what he had said; and as statutory definition and court construction were to his mind the ultimate sources of ethical obligation, he felt that he had been guilty of no wrong doing.

Yet he was not without apprehension. Since his advent in Virginia he had discovered that in that strangely constituted society — which he could neither understand nor secure admission to — quixotic old gentlemen of Colonel Shenstone's type, especially where they stood high at the bar as the colonel did, were able to exercise an influence over courts and juries that he could in no wise understand. They seemed to be able, upon occasion, to go behind the "statutes in that case made and provided," and to invoke a higher law which they called honor, with extraordinary success.

Indeed, it was his observation of this sort of thing that had induced Stone to leave New York at the beginning of his career and seek

a practice in Virginia. During a period of observation there he had made up his mind that the lawyers in that state were sadly wanting in sagacity. They seemed to be able men, learned in those broad principles of law and equity which he had purposely neglected, because of his quick appreciation of their uselessness in the winning of cases; but every time he went into court as a spectator of proceedings, he saw these men actually losing vital points in their cases, not only by their quixotic refusal to take advantage of technicalities that tended to the defeat of justice, but still more by their refusal to pervert provisions of law to the advantage of their clients, as they easily might have done. These men actually proceeded upon that exploded old dictum of the English law, which they had sworn to obey, that a lawyer's duty is to be "true to himself, true to the law, true to the court, and true to the client." They put themselves first, insisting upon it that as gentlemen they must maintain an attitude of honor and integrity, even though the client's cause should suffer loss. They insisted upon being true to

the law, even when the law was adverse to their clients. They recognized their obligation to be " true to the court " by refusing to pervert law in the interest of clients who had paid them to conduct their cases to successful issue. In their view the interests of the client were subsidiary to all these higher considerations, and so in their hands a client was likely to lose his case if it were not a good one, supported by considerations of right and justice.

This was not Fernando Stone's idea of the function of the lawyer. He had been trained to think that it is the sole duty of the lawyer to win his client's case, right or wrong, and to that end to employ every means in his power.

As he sat looking on at Virginia court proceedings, he saw case after case lost upon principle which he confidently believed he could have won by disregard of principle and insistence upon technicality.

He saw a great opportunity for the exercise of his peculiar abilities in a State in which the practitioners of law were so greatly hampered and restrained by conscience and by absurd traditions of honorable conduct.

So, taking a partner of his own kind, he settled in Richmond. In the lower courts he achieved a certain measure of success. He succeeded by adroit insistence upon technicalities, in so far winning his cases as to bring himself into a considerable practice and into hopeless disrepute among honorable men. But to his surprise his success in the higher courts met with obstacles which he could in no wise understand. There seemed to prevail in those courts a disposition to regard justice and right, and the obligations of common honesty as actually superior to statutory provisions. More annoying still, the courts of Virginia insisted upon construing even statutory provisions in the light of these absurdly sentimental theories of "right between man and man." In one case in particular, Stone had met with defeat in a peculiarly humiliating manner. Before Judge Clopton he had made a technical point with great ingenuity. The Judge courteously commended the ingenuity of the counsel, but added:

"The court can not believe that the law of Virginia intends injustice or means to tolerate

it. The construction which the ingenuity of counsel has sought to place upon it, would, if sustained by the court, work a grievous injustice. The court, therefore, refuses to accept that construction, and instructs the jury to disregard it utterly. With that instruction, given with all the emphasis the court can command, the jury will take the case." And the jury did, and gave a verdict against his client.

Nevertheless, Fernando Stone, as he drove to the station, was unable to understand Colonel Shenstone's angry reception of his proposal of compromise. It was clear to his mind that his client's case had enough of plausibility in it to make defense against it a rather costly indulgence. With a view to his own fees, he stood ready to advise a compromise if the colonel had consented to pay a sum much smaller than the cost of litigation, a sum one-half of which he would gladly take as his own compensation. He even stood ready, in that case, to compel his client's acceptance of half of the money in satisfaction of her claim, by advising her that she really had no case at all,

and that she ought to be very grateful to him for having compelled Colonel Shenstone to buy her off.

Colonel Shenstone's meditations after the man's departure, were of a very different kind.

"Confound the fellow!" he thought — for he objected to swearing as unbecoming in a gentleman — "confound the fellow! I wonder what sort of swinish brute he thought me. Anyhow, I've given him enough points on which he must furnish proof to keep him busy till Phil comes and tells me the whole story. Till he does, I'm crippled by lack of knowledge of the facts. When I know them all I'll find a way to twist that wretched little statute-monger into all sorts of double bow knots. I can beat him on the principles of course, even without the facts. There isn't a court in Virginia that would take my dear Little Minx out of my care and turn her over to a woman who wants to make a stage performer of her. But I want to know the facts, I'll write to Greg to send Phil to me the moment he gets to Richmond."

And he did. And in due course of mail

his summons should have reached Greg Tazewell and through him come into Phil Shenstone's hands, early on the next morning. But as his body servant never could be persuaded to understand that the postal requirements of the United States Government were applicable to missives sent by so distinguished a person as his master, he omitted to affix a stamp to Colonel Shenstone's letter.

The body servant was so far right in his understanding of such matters that the postmaster at the station, instead of sending the communication to the dead letter office for lack of postage, held it until the next day, when embracing an opportunity, he returned it to Colonel Shenstone with a rather elaborate apology, explanation and humble request that the stamp required by law should be affixed to it.

In the meanwhile Greg Tazewell, to whom the letter was addressed, had left Richmond for the North without explanation, without previous notice to anybody, and leaving behind him only a brief note, written to give his address to Phil Shenstone in case of need.

XXV

BUT Phil Shenstone needed no summons from his uncle. He had hurried from the West to Richmond for the express purpose of going to Woodlands, consulting Colonel Shenstone and taking upon himself the fight in Valorie's behalf. It had been his intention to go at once to Woodlands without pausing even to have his clothes brushed or his shoes polished. But Greg Tazewell had sent an emissary to meet him at the railway station, and in answer to the summons he had gone to the hotel to meet his friend and learn what he could of the situation. Then had come Mrs. Albemarle's note and he had felt bound to respond to it. Upon leaving her he must go to the florist's, of course, and discharge himself of his indebtedness for the gloves. After that he had to go to the bank to secure the promised letter of

credit, and that took so much time that really he felt that it would not do to leave its delivery to the deliberate movements of a bank messenger. Mrs. Albemarle had named no time within which the document should be delivered, but she had mysteriously intimated her purpose to do something without delay and he, in his turn, had assured her that he would arrange the matter at once. It was obvious, therefore, that he ought to deliver the document in person. Besides — well, he had seen Valorie only in Mrs. Albemarle's presence, and possibly — no, it would be better if it should turn out otherwise. Still — well on the whole his duty to deliver the financial paper in person and at once was obvious. Moreover, the cashier had charged him to see to it that Valorie should write her signature upon it for identification, and that might need some explanation to one so unused as she was to financial transactions.

So, calling a cab, he drove to Mrs. Albemarle's.

That was precisely what that sagacious gentlewoman had expected him to do, and in

preparation for it she had conjured up a weariness. She never had a headache. She was too abundantly healthly for that sort of feminine indulgence. "Besides," she often said when that plea was suggested to her, "nobody would ever believe me. For the life of me I can't 'look the part' of a lackadaisical, headache-ridden woman." But to-day, in anticipation of Phil Shenstone's visit, of which she was as confident as she was of the striking of the clock, she took pains to feel weary and indisposed to exert herself in the reception of visitors.

"I'm going to make myself comfortable for once, Val," she said. "I'm going to put off my gown and snuggle into something soft, and warm and easy. If anybody calls I'll excuse myself. I'm going to rest while you read John Esten Cooke's new novel to me. It's called 'Henry St. John, Gentleman,' and you'll find it on the table. You know John Esten Cooke is our Virginia novelist, and he's sure to call here pretty soon. When he does we must both be prepared to talk intelligently about his new novel. Be-

sides, he's the dearest soul imaginable — a gentleman altogether, gentle and manly, and the very soul of honor and chivalry. I wish all our young men were such as he is. Be sure, when you talk to him to remember that it was his brother, Philip Pendleton Cooke, who wrote 'Florence Vane,' the poem you were reading last night. There's a chance that some others may call to-day, possibly John R. Thompson, or even 'the solitary horseman.'"

"Who's the solitary horseman, please?" asked Val. "I've met a Mr. Cooke and Mr. Thompson, but who is the other?"

"Why, George Prince Regent James, of course. That isn't his name exactly, but we who know him and love him, call him that, just for fun, and because he is a very prince regent of courtesy. His real name is George Payne Rainsford James, and you've read his novels as by G. P. R. James. He's Her Britannic Majesty's Consul in Richmond and the jolliest old boy you ever saw. John R. Thompson, as of course you know, is another of our literary lights. He's a poet and the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger.*

By the way, in case, he should call you'd better beforehand read a little poem he has just published. It is called 'Lou.' You'll find the magazine containing it on my dressing table. It has a line in it well worth remembering, Describing Lou it says:

> 'And the soft October sunshine was tangled in her hair.'

That's better than Tennyson's

> 'Glittering like a swarm of fireflies, tangled in a silver braid,'

because it's simpler and more natural, it seems to me. If you agree with me, remember to express that opinion the first time Thompson calls. There are some others. I think you've met Mr. DeWitt, the editor, and Mr. A. Judson Crane who practices law for a living and writes poetry for pleasure. Now that I think of it, Richmond is quite a literary centre. There are four or five of my Richmond college boys who write verses for the *Waverly Magazine* and send them to me to be admired."

"There don't seem to be any women in your list," said Valorie.

"Oh, of course there are Marion Harland and Mary Raglan and half a dozen other dear friends of mine who write divinely. But they are women and if any of them should call I'd order them up here for a cozy chat. I was only cataloguing the men, because if any one of them calls you'll have to receive him and tell him I've wrapped myself up in cotton wool till I'm utterly invisible. He'll be glad of that, if he has good taste, and if he hasn't he may as well go away. You see, dear, men are like morning glories."

"How do you mean?"

"Why morning glories lovingly climb over any old stump or railpile, and cling to it as if they really appreciated it, when in fact what they want is access to the sunlight above. So it is with men. I'm over forty, my dear, and supremely happily married. I love and trust my husband and he loves and trusts me. Incidentally, and just for your private instruction, he and I worship each other in private, though in public we pose merely as the best of good comrades. We're carrying on a social establishment together, and we're getting a lot

of fun out of it. He rejoices to see me a social queen, and I rejoice to see him a king among men. He's a judge, you know, of our highest court, and so his word is law. If any distinguished gentleman from any part of the world comes to Richmond, he becomes Judge Albemarle's guest, quite as a matter of course, and I really have a great deal of trouble, dear, in deciding in each case whom to invite to meet the distinguished stranger. I must pick out six, eight or ten as the case may be, and it is a puzzle to know which six, eight or ten to choose. I must say Judge Albemarle is always ready to help me. If there are thirty men who ought to be invited and thirty women of course, and we can't invite but ten of each and don't know whom to choose, he suddenly has an inspiration. Not that I suggest it, dear, for I never do that, and when you are married you'll do well to remember never to suggest anything to your husband. If you let him take the initiative always, he'll appreciate his manhood and worship you as the very wisest woman in the world, a woman who adequately recognizes masculinity. But you

can very easily put him in the way of suggesting the right thing.

"For instance, when Jack and I — I mean the Judge of course, but I have a habit of calling him Jack because that is what he was called when I married him — when he and I find it impossible to determine which ten men should be chosen, of the thirty that ought to be invited to meet the distinguished stranger, I fall into a state of hopeless imbecility and begin 'wishing' things. Of course 'wishing' is the resort and resource of imbeciles only. I 'wish' our dining room would accommodate the whole thirty and the complementary women, and I say, 'then we could give three dinners at once.' Of course the wish is futile, and I know it; but it suggests something brilliant to Jack, and that is what I intend.

"'Great thought,' he exclaims. 'We can't give one dinner to thirty men and thirty women but why not give three dinners to ten men and ten women each, on successive evenings? It would emphasize your social control of the distinguished stranger.' I meekly

submit and the thing goes off perfectly. Jack, the dear fellow — oh, I forgot, I should say Judge Albemarle — is happy and I am happy, and everybody else is happy. There's nothing in the world like tact, Val, and after all it is only a tender deference to other people's self love. And why shouldn't we minister to that? It is only a kindly, generous, sympathetic thing to do. Did it ever occur to you, Val, that to every human being the most interesting thing in existence is himself? Then if we want our fellows to be happy, why shouldn't we feel and manifest an interest in them? That's what we call 'tact' but after all it is nothing but kindly human sympathy, and as we are all human, why shouldn't we cultivate it? It seems to me that there is only a choice between 'tact,' which means sympathy, and the utter selfishness which puts others out of the reckoning and regards only oneself. For my part I prefer to be interested in others and to make them feel that I am so."

"But my dear Mrs. Albemarle," said Valorie, who neither understood nor suspected what was going on with respect to herself, and

who knew not why she was lingering so long in town, "All you are saying to me sounds as if I were to remain here for a long time to come, when I'm daily expecting Uncle Butler to send the Woodlands carriage for me. In fact I've written asking him to do so, now that the theatricals are over. Of course it's delightful to be with you, but Uncle Butler needs me to keep him company, and I'm positively frightened when I think how the housekeeping there is going at loose ends."

"My dear," returned the elder woman, "you don't understand. You are staying here not only with Colonel Shenstone's consent, but by his desire. You shall know all about it presently, but just now it's a dead secret between Colonel Shenstone and me."

With that she withdrew into her dressing room to "snuggle into something soft and warm and easy," as she had said, and Valorie sat down in great perplexity. She took up the magazine and tried to read John R. Thompson's little poem, but she could not keep her attention fixed upon the lines. As she thought of what her hostess had said to

her, her perplexity became a troubled anxiety. Could it be that she had offended Colonel Shenstone, or that he too had been displeased by her assumption of Jennie Hight's part? He had not seemed to be so at the time, but perhaps it was only his courtesy to conceal his displeasure. Then another thought came to her. Perhaps he had fallen ill again and was trying to conceal the fact from her. At that thought she became positively alarmed.

At that moment Mrs. Albemarle returned to the room just as a maid entered, bearing Phil Shenstone's card.

"Go down and receive him, dear. Tell him I'm fleece-lined now and all muffled up, and am seeing nobody but that you are taking my place."

XXVI

IT was with something of eagerness but more of reluctance that Valorie descended the stairs and entered the parlors to meet Phil Shenstone alone. She eagerly wanted to see him again and talk with him in the old familiar way. There were scores of things she wanted to say to him and scores of other things she wanted to ask him. And yet she felt a strange shrinking from the interview which she could in no wise explain to herself. If she could have had Mrs. Albemarle with her, as she had had her in the morning, as a sort of protector, she felt that the meeting would have been an altogether welcome event. As it was, she twice paused upon the stairs, half minded to retreat. She was both amused and angry with herself for her senseless shrinking.

"What is the matter with me, I wonder?"

she said to herself. "I'm not afraid of Mr. Phil — at least I never was before. No, that's not it. I'm not afraid of him now. He's the best friend I ever had in the world. It is something else, I'm afraid of. Maybe I'm afraid of myself. I reckon that's it, but I don't understand it. It's only foolishness anyhow."

And with a determined dismissal of the unworthy fear she calmly passed into the room where he sat, and tried to greet her friend and protector with the old cordiality that had marked their intercourse ever since he had taken her from the convent, rescuing her from something, she knew not what, and bringing her into the easy, graceful and strangely fascinating Virginia life that she loved so much. Her effort was measurably successful, but not so completely so as she had hoped to make it. Phil Shenstone discovered the effort she was making to banish restraint from her manner, and to him the explanation seemed obvious.

"She is shy of telling me about her feeling for Greg Tazewell," he thought. And on his own part he dreaded lest she should do

so. He had no doubt of the facts, but he shrank from her confession of them as from an expected blow.

In his anxiety to prevent the open revelation, he managed to put something of strangeness and hardness into his own manner, which Valorie had never seen there before.

Under ordinary circumstances, meeting her after so long an absence, his first words would have been:

"Sit here by me, Val, and tell me all about yourself."

He dared not say that now, lest the telling "all about herself," should consist chiefly in telling him the one thing he shrank from hearing from her lips, though he confidently believed he knew it already. He felt that he could hear that news with a calmer mind from Greg Tazewell himself, and indeed he had gone to Greg's hotel room while waiting for the letter of credit, for the express purpose of giving his friend an opportunity to tell him. Half to his disappointment and half to his relief, he had discovered that the young doctor had left at noon for New York, leav-

ing a note for himself, saying that he had been suddenly called North and giving him an address in New York where he might be reached by mail or telegraph if Colonel Shenstone should fall ill again or in the event of any other emergency requiring his presence in Virginia.

Confidently supposing that Valorie must know all about this matter, Phil was on the point of asking her when Tazewell would return, but he shrank from that as he had done from the other suggested opening of the conversation, lest it lead at once to the revelation he dreaded to receive from her lips.

So after the first greetings were over there was an awkward pause — such as had never before vexed the intercourse of these two. By way of ending it, Phil said:

"I'm delighted to see you looking so well, Val, and I'm glad to tell you that our steamboats are all prosperously busy again."

The girl eagerly caught at the opportunity thus to avoid a too personal conversation.

"Yes," she said quickly, "Dr. Tazewell told me a few days ago that you had succeeded

in getting your business affairs into a satisfactory state again, and I'm *so* glad for your sake."

"You've reason to be glad for your own, Val. Did I never tell you that all the money your father left with me for you is invested in those steamboats?"

"I don't think you ever did, or if you did I suppose I wasn't paying attention. Anyhow I've been perfectly satisfied to leave all that to you."

"Thank you. I'm glad to report that your money has quite doubled itself since your father's death, and in the present condition of the steamboat business it is likely to double itself again within the next year,— unless for some reason you should decide to withdraw it and invest it in some other way."

"Why how could I ever think of that, Mr. Phil? You're the best friend I ever had, aren't you?"

"I hope you'll always think so Val, and I intend to be that always, but I didn't know. You see — well don't let us talk of that. When Greg comes back —"

"Why, has Dr. Tazewell gone away?" she asked in a surprise so genuine that he could not doubt its reality. "I don't think he told Mrs. Albemarle he was going."

Phil Shenstone was sorely puzzled, but the subject was a dangerous one for minute inquiry, so he merely answered:

"I rather wonder at that. All I know is that when I tried to see him an hour or two ago I found him gone. He left a note for me saying he had been suddenly called to New York and giving me his address there."

The girl sat in meditation for a moment. Then she asked:

"Will you give me the address? You see if Uncle Butler should have another dangerous attack I should want to telegraph him to come back immediately. I simply couldn't let any other doctor treat Uncle Butler. I don't believe there is any other doctor who could do it successfully. At any rate I shouldn't want any other to have the case."

Phil personally shared Valorie's opinion of the superiority of Greg Tazewell's learning and skill, but he interpreted her attitude as a

confirmation of his conviction that these two had come to an understanding. "A woman never thinks in that way," he reflected, "about any man but the one who has won her heart completely."

"I quite agree with you," he answered, "but I hope the emergency you suggest may not arise. I'm going out to Woodlands this afternoon by the train, to attend to some business. I imagine Uncle Butler has been wondering why I am not there already. But I couldn't go till now. I had some matters to attend to here, chiefly for Mrs. Albemarle. By the way, the main thing she wanted me to do was to get this document for you, and as I can't see her I must put it into your hands. It's just as well, for you must put your signature beneath it."

"What is it?" she asked with that little scared feeling with which women unaccustomed to documentary solemnities always approach a matter of the kind.

"Oh, it is nothing very dreadful — nothing that need alarm you. It is only a letter of credit."

"What is that?"

"Why, simply a letter issued by a bank, telling bankers in other cities that you have money on deposit in the bank issuing it, and asking them to cash any drafts you may make upon your account."

"But I haven't any use for such a letter as that — a letter of credit."

"You might have, Val. If you should travel to the North or to Europe, you'd need —"

The girl rose excitedly and confronted Phil, who courteously rose as she did.

"What does all this mean, Mr. Phil?" she asked with a flash of anger in her eyes which made her seem more beautiful than ever to Phil Shenstone. "Mrs. Albemarle is having a lot of clothes made for me that I don't in the least need, and she won't tell me why. She refuses to let me go back to Woodlands, and she won't tell me why. Uncle Butler doesn't send the carriage for me, and he won't tell me why. And now you have been getting this paper for me, and you won't tell me why. You must and you shall, or I'll go to Wood-

lands by train and make Uncle Butler tell me. What does it all mean?"

"Sit down again, Val, and listen," he said soothingly. "I see how you feel about these things and I don't wonder you feel so. You think we are treating you like a child, and we have no right to do that, for you are a grown woman now and a woman entitled to be consulted in all that concerns herself. But, believe me, those who care very dearly for you, have preserved secrecy with respect to those plans, not because they did not trust your judgment and your womanly capacity to act wisely, but simply because they wished to spare you annoyance over troubles that may never come. For my part I do not think their secrecy wise in itself or just to you, and I am deliberately going to betray it, by telling you the facts so far as you may care to know them. I'm under no pledge of secrecy and no obligation of any kind to withhold these things. So if you will dismiss your vexation with me and listen, you shall hear all about it."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Phil," she said eagerly, resuming her seat. "You know I

couldn't be angry with you. But please go on. I'm on pins and needles of anxiety."

Unhappily for Valorie, another caller was at that moment announced. As she afterwards said:

"Things *will* happen in that way sometimes, and one just has to bear it with a smiling face; but it is very annoying."

She bore herself well under the infliction, but she made what effort she could to shorten the period of interruption. She told the visitor, with every mark of sincerity, how sorry she was that Mrs. Albemarle could see no callers that day, and as she did so she indulged a hope that he would announce his purpose to call again, and take his leave. Instead of that he gallantly declared that Valorie's presence amply compensated for any other absence.

"I shall certainly not report that speech to Mrs. Albemarle," she replied.

"No, please don't."

And so with entirely vapid and meaningless pleasantries for conversation, he sat out the full time allowed by custom for a call. It was

a brief time, of course, but to impatient Valorie it seemed at least an hour. And the worst of it was that she was beset by apprehension lest some other caller should come before this one left. She was spared that, however, and at last Phil was able to tell her what she so greatly wanted to hear.

"There are some people, Val," he began, "who are trying to get possession and control of you by some sort of legal process. I don't understand just how they intend to go about it, but I suppose Uncle Butler does, and he had Greg Tazewell telegraph me to come on here so that I may give him all the facts in your case. You see he must know everything I know, in order to defeat these people's purposes. That's why I must go to Woodlands by the afternoon train. I'm afraid he is very impatiently waiting for me. As nearly as I understand the matter he intends to fight it out in the courts, if he finds he can do so successfully, and if not, then to fight it out in some other way. Until he gets all the facts from me, he cannot be sure what he can do in the courts. If he finds that he cannot surely

beat the rascally lawyers at the legal game, I reckon he intends to put you out of their reach and beat them in that way. I don't know that. It is only my conjecture. I imagine he is keeping you here with Mrs. Albemarle so that nobody can serve any sort of papers upon you, and I suppose that if worse comes to worst, he intends Mrs. Albemarle to slip away with you and take you to Europe for a time. I suppose that is why she is having a wardrobe prepared for you — so that you may be ready to slip away at a moment's notice."

The girl's face was so pale that Phil thought she was going to faint, but there was a resolute look in her eyes that reassured him. She tried to say something, but succeeded only in getting out the words: "Go on please!"

"I've told you all you need to know for the present," he said, "all that I myself know, for that matter, and I have barely time to catch my train. You must go above stairs now and rest. I'll return to Richmond the moment I get through with Uncle Butler. Till then adieu."

Valorie would have detained him if she could. She had many questions to ask and some things to say on her own account. But Phil understood, if she did not, how important it was not to tax her nervous strength further, and the necessity of hurrying to catch the train afforded him ample excuse for an abrupt parting. Fearing that she might faint upon his withdrawal, he pulled the bell cord before he passed out the door.

She called after him:

"Thank you, Mr. Phil, with all my heart. You're always good to me."

XXVII

PHIL SHENSTONE had been gone scarcely half an hour when the Woodlands' carriage drove up, with Valorie's own maid for its solitary passenger.

The maid bore a brief note from Col. Shenstone to Mrs. Albemarle, asking her to send Valorie home in the carriage and adding by way of explanation:

"I fear I am coming down again under a severe attack of my old enemy, gout, and with Greg gone North — I don't know where — and Phil not arrived yet, I cannot get on without my Little Minx. Please let the carriage begin its return journey as soon as Valorie can be ready, lest the trip extend beyond the daylight."

Valorie, pale, frightened and exceedingly indignant, was sitting in her own room when the carriage came, trying to formulate a pur-

pose already born in her mind, and to determine in what way she could most effectively carry it out. She was resolved, for one thing that she would not run away from the danger that threatened her, and the nature of which she understood more clearly than Phil Shenstone did.

"It would be cowardly to do that," she reflected, "and I don't think I'm a coward. No, I'll stay while Uncle Butler and Mr. Phil fight it out for me, and if they are beaten, I know what to do. I know what those people want. They intend to get possession of me and make a public performer of me for their own benefit. Very well. I'll balk that. They may get possession of me, but they cannot make a public performer of me, for I will not perform. Not a note will I strike for them, not a step will I dance, no matter what they may do to me."

It was then that Mrs. Albemarle entered the room bearing Colonel Shenstone's note, and instantly every thought was driven out of the girl's mind except that of setting out for Woodlands at the earliest possible moment.

She bade her maid pack a little trunk for her hurriedly.

"Just *throw* the things in, Sylvia; never mind folding them. We must get away quickly. Is your master very, very ill? Tell me the truth, do you hear?"

"No, Miss Valorie, he doan seem very sick to me. He's jes' limpin' roun' an' frettin' like, an' his lips is purty pale, but dat's all, as fur's I kin see. But he's mighty onpatient to git you home. He scolded me fur wantin' to stop long enough to change my dress, and made me git into de carriage jes' as I was, 'thout even breshin' my ha'."

"I understand. Hand me his note from the table there."

She was changing her gown with Mrs. Albemarle's assistance, and as she stood she read the note again. One phrase in it struck her for the first time. It was that in which Colonel Shenstone mentioned Greg Tazewell's absence at the North and added, "I don't know where." Instantly she realized that no telegram had yet been sent to Tazewell; that it would be at least two hours before Phil could

reach Woodlands; and that it would be still another hour before he could get a telegram back to the railway station for transmission to New York. Fortunately Phil had given her the address, and she resolved to save those three hours by sending a despatch on her own responsibility. About the only definite idea she had with regard to a telegraphic message was that it should be couched in as few words as possible. In her effort to comply with that requirement she managed to make her despatch a very peremptory one. It read:

"Come home quick. Uncle ill."

She did not pause to reflect that as Tazewell had not left Richmond until noon of that day, he was scarcely more than started on his journey. In fact he did not reach New York till the next day. When he did, he went to a hotel and then at once to the banker's, to whose care the despatch had been sent.

He obeyed the summons instantly. But it very greatly distressed him that the occasion for his return had arisen. He had nothing to do in New York, and the occasion for his going thither at all had been only a pretended

necessity. He had gone solely for the purpose of taking himself out of Phil's way, and leaving him a fair field with Valorie. For if Phil Shenstone was one of two gentlemen of Virginia, Greg Tazewell was the other. They were equally chivalric in soul and conduct, each equally resolute to do his duty regardless of his own desires and of consequences to himself. As Phil, confidently believing that his friend had won favor in Valorie's eyes, had betaken himself to the West, in order to leave Greg free to win the woman they both loved, so now Greg Tazewell, equally convinced that Phil Shenstone needed only to woo in order to win, had gone to the North to take himself out of the way of the wooing. In both cases the man making the sacrifice of self upon the altar of honor was additionally moved to the course he took by a natural desire to spare himself the pain of witnessing a happiness that involved himself in distress. Just as Phil Shenstone would have remained at the West with this intent, but for the peremptory summons home for Valorie's defense, so Greg Tazewell would at this time have gone abroad

upon a pretence of scientific study, but for Colonel Shenstone's need of him.

Thus do men of sensitive minds play at cross purposes when they happen to be loyal friends — and in love with the same woman. These things constitute a part of the Human Comedy, but it sometimes happens that they convert the comedy into the saddest of tragedies — for the woman in the case.

XXVIII

FOR the first few miles of the journey Valorie had a broad, smooth, turnpike road to travel over, and as Colonel Shenstone's horses were always good and in good condition, her continual urging induced the driver to remain awake and make rapid progress. Then came the country roads, sometimes good in parts, in summer, but inexpressibly bad everywhere at this time of year, with long stretches of mire so deep that even the stout horses found it difficult to achieve more than a snail's pace. While passing over those spaces the driver must remain awake, or the horses, for want of urging, would have stopped entirely.

Just as the carriage came to the end of a long stretch of saturated and glutinous red clay road, and began the ascent of a hill, Valorie was startled by the appearance of Phil

Shenstone, on horseback, at the side of the vehicle. His high boots were red with mud, as if he had been walking, and his clothing, and even his face, were blotched with soil.

Her exclamation and his were in effect the same—"What are you doing here?" Phil was the first to answer.

"The wretched train broke down a few miles out of town," he said, "and after waiting half an hour, seeing no prospect of its speedy repair, I walked a mile or so to a plantation, secured a good horse and set out to ride the rest of the way. Seeing the Woodlands carriage ahead of me, I recognized it in spite of its envelopment in mud, and hurried on to catch up with it. I didn't expect to find you in it though. If you'll shut your eyes a little and try to think of my bedraggled person as that of a gallant outrider, devoted to your service, I'll accompany you the rest of the way."

"Please don't jest, Mr. Phil! Uncle Butler is very ill again and Dr. Tazewell isn't here and I can't think what may happen. I've telegraphed for Dr. Tazewell, telling him to come

home quick. How soon do you think he can get here?"

"When did you telegraph?"

"This afternoon — just before I started."

"He won't be in New York," Phil said, reflectively, "till some time to-morrow. If he starts back at once — and of course he will — he should be here by day after to-morrow."

"I didn't think of that. How terrible it is to wait so long for him. But you mustn't stay here talking to me, please. Ride on as fast as you can. Uncle Butler needs *somebody* with him, even if Dr. Tazewell isn't at hand."

Phil put spurs to his horse, meditating upon her last speech, to which he attached a special significance. The emphasis she had put upon the word "somebody," meant that she regarded his presence as a very inadequate substitute for that of Greg Tazewell.

"And so it is," he thought, "so far as ministry to my uncle in his illness is concerned. But is that all she meant?"

With that he again urged his horse forward, impatient to be at Woodlands where he might

find other occupation for his mind than brooding over these things to no purpose.

"After all," he reminded himself, "what does it matter? If I were in any uncertainty it might be worth my while to speculate upon the niceties of meaning that her words may carry. As I am not in any uncertainty, I must regard myself as a sublimated idiot in doing anything of the kind. I won't do it again."

The winter sunset had already fallen when he dismounted at Woodlands. Throwing his rein to a negro boy and bidding him take the horse to the stables, he hurried into the house in anxiety as to his uncle's condition. He found the old gentleman tossing about on a lounge, and immediately ordered him to bed, where one in his condition belonged.

"You're covered with mud," said Colonel Shenstone as he submitted himself to be undressed by his body servant. "You must have come on horseback?"

"I did — for the greater part of the way. The train broke down. But you musn't bother to talk now, Uncle Butler. You must get to bed."

"Then you didn't bring my Little Minx with you. I'm very sorry."

"She will be here within half an hour. She is coming in the carriage, you know, and the roads are very heavy. I passed her a mile or so away."

This news brought a light into the old gentleman's face, and without further questions he permitted Phil to help him into bed. But there was still something on his mind, for as Phil turned to the fire to dry his boots, he called to him:

"Wait a moment, Phil. There's something else. Those rascals will take pains to know that Val has come home, and they may try to kidnap her under some form of law, I don't know what. My head isn't clear and the pain is so great. You must look out for her Phil, and not let them come near the house."

"Rest easy, Uncle. I'll look out for that, and you may go to sleep in perfect confidence that nobody shall approach this house during your illness without my knowledge and consent. There's the carriage with Val."

He hurried out to assist her to alight but she

had not waited for him. She had herself opened the carriage door, sprung out of the vehicle and nimbly covered the ground that lay between the landing and the porch, where she met Phil on his way out.

"How is Uncle Butler?" she asked, but without waiting to hear his answer, she hurried to the old gentleman's room to see for herself.

She found him distinctly better than he had been half an hour before,— because of the comfort of her coming. But she wanted the fullest possible information and sought it by questioning while she was throwing open her wraps and removing her bonnet,— for in those old days even the youngest women wore bonnets and were exceedingly pretty in them, too. Those old daguerreotypes which suggest the contrary are bearers of false witness.

"But you must be very tired, Little Minx, and you can't have had your dinner," said he, in tender concern for her.

"I was very tired, but I'm rested now that I'm with you and find you so much better than I feared. Are you sleepy, Uncle Butler?"

"No, my dear. I've slept off and on all day."

"Then, if I may, I'm going to have my little dinner right here in your room. May I?"

His look of gratification was answer enough, as she turned to give orders to a servant.

"I'll run upstairs and get myself into an easy gown of some sort, Uncle, but I'll be back in a minute."

"God bless the Little Minx!" he murmured as she left the room. When her dinner was brought in, the two fell into a quiet, soothing talk which lasted for more than an hour in a lazy, desultory, and comfortable fashion.

In the meanwhile Phil Shenstone made preparations for the defense he had promised. He armed three young negro men with shotguns, and stationing them in commanding positions, ordered them to see to it that nobody not a friend of the family, known to them as such, should be permitted upon any pretext whatsoever to approach the house until he should himself be notified. He had the utmost confidence in the execution of his instructions to the letter. He had been brought up in the plantation life.

He knew the loyalty of the negroes to their master; he knew their lifelong habit of obeying orders, as the soldier does, without questioning them and without a thought of personal responsibility for the consequences of obedience.

"I suppose it's a high-handed proceeding," he said to Valorie when she left her uncle asleep and joined him in the hall. "It might make trouble, in case a sheriff's deputy should come to serve papers. I think I've heard something about the enormity of the offense involved in resisting an officer of the law in the execution of his duty, but —"

"Oh, Mr. Phil, please don't get yourself arrested!" pleaded the girl with much concern in her voice, a fact which Phil observed with a little quickening of the pulse. "Please don't take any risk like that."

"Nobody is likely to arrest me while those boys are on guard," he replied smiling. "Besides, a man's house is his castle, you know, and he has a right to defend it against all intruders. At any rate I've undertaken the task of excluding all strangers from this house, and

of course I'll do it, if only in order that Uncle Butler may sleep peacefully and get well."

"You really do think he'll get well, don't you, Mr. Phil?" eagerly asked the girl with her hands pleadingly upon his arm. She had thus easily and quickly transferred her solicitude from the younger man to the older one, and the completeness of the transfer seemed to Phil Shenstone chasteningly significant.

XXIX

VALORIE slept that night upon an improvised couch in a room adjoining Colonel Shenstone's, while his body servant watched by his bedside, with orders to wake her instantly if necessity should arise.

When morning came the sick man was neither better nor worse, but to Phil's suggestion that they should send for some neighboring physician, Valorie opposed an entreaty.

"I don't think we need do that," she replied. "Dr. Tazewell will surely be here by to-morrow night, and you know he's the only doctor round here who knows how to treat such a case. I know all the little palliative things he would order done if he were here. I can keep Uncle Butler fairly comfortable till he comes, and I don't want any other doctor to meddle with the case. Still, of course, it is for you to decide."

"It shall be as you wish," he answered, "and perhaps you are right."

His mind was upon this new manifestation of Valorie's attitude toward Greg Tazewell. "She well nigh worships him," he said to himself. "And that is as it should be,— under the circumstances." But he did not formulate the circumstances to which his thought referred.

During that afternoon a messenger from the railway station brought a telegram from Greg Tazewell to Valorie.

"Starting at once," it read; "if I make all connections should arrive at six o'clock to-morrow evening."

"It's hard to wait so long," said Valorie; "but there's no help for it. Uncle seems a little better to-day, and anyhow, Dr. Tazewell will be here by six or seven o'clock to-morrow evening. Please send a strong, fast horse to meet the train, Mr. Phil."

"If I make all connections," the dispatch said. In that primitive time the phrase covered a good deal of uncertainty. Railroading was in its infancy then, or at best in its early

childhood, and travel was beset by uncertainty. Tracks were ill built. Rails were simply spiked down to ties that lay more or less loosely on the earthen roadbed. The iron rails were in no way fastened together at the ends, and in many cases they were badly laminated. Engines were feeble and of imperfect construction. Axles were so badly made that "hot-boxes" were of frequent occurrence, causing much delay. As each railroad was operated separately and with very little reference to others, one or more missed connections were to be expected in the case of every journey like that from New York to Richmond, involving as it did eight or nine changes of cars or boats.

Knowing these conditions far better than Valorie did, Phil was less confident than she of Greg's arrival on the appointed evening. Still he hoped. He sent a servant with a horse to meet the six o'clock train, directing him, if Greg should not arrive at the expected time, to wait until he did come.

The day of waiting was a tedious one to Phil. Valorie ministered to Colonel Shen-

stone's needs, and was almost all the time in his chamber, so that the young man had not the relief of her company. During the morning there came a special messenger from Mrs. Albemarle, bearing a note of inquiry to Valorie, who, in her preoccupation with nursing, asked Phil to answer it in her stead. By way of killing time he wrote at almost inexcusable length. After that he had nothing to do but walk restlessly about like a perturbed spirit until late in the afternoon, when Edna Spottswood arrived to make inquiries concerning the invalid. After a brief interview Valorie, pleading the necessity of her return to the sick room, turned the visitor over to Phil, as she had done with the note.

This was a welcome circumstance, for Phil Shenstone had conceived a very pronounced liking for Edna Spottswood.

As he had not seen her for many months past, there was much for the two to talk about and they made the most of it. But in the course of their conversation the young woman told him some things that not only distressed him, but filled him with self-reproach.

The Mattapony plantation was one of those over which Colonel Shenstone had a certain supervision as counsel, but still more as a friend of the family. It was a fine estate, now fallen into difficulties. Its late owner, Edna Spottswood's father, had managed the cultivation of its fields fairly well, but, after the manner of his predecessors, he had maintained a scale of living which its revenues could ill support. Generous, open handed, hospitable, and imbued with an unconquerable optimism, he had year by year added to the large hereditary debt, until at his death Colonel Shenstone found the plantation too heavily encumbered to be easily relieved. Added to this was the fact that with only two women to manage it, the place yielded less than before, so that its difficulties increased.

When Colenel Shenstone, during the preceding autumn, had sought to equip Phil with the information necessary to enable him to act as the old gentleman's substitute in the management of the estates in his charge, his chief purpose had been to bring the young man's busi-

ness sagacity to bear upon the Mattapony problem.

When Edna explained to him how matters with her mother and herself had gone from bad to worse during his absence, he reproached himself for having remained away so long. But neither idle self-reproach nor idle wishing was habitual with Phil Shenstone. It was his habit to make himself master of the terms of every problem presented to him, and to bring all his energy and all his sagacity to bear upon its solution.

"I will to-day go carefully over all the papers in my uncle's possession," he said to the sorely distressed girl, "and to-morrow, if Greg gets here to-night, I'll ride over to Mattapony and go through all the papers there. Please have them ready for me. I'll try to find a way out,— or make one." He added the last phrase with a note of determination which increased the girl's admiration for him very dangerously to herself.

For admiration, in a woman, for the person, the manners and the character of a young

man, if the young man is not in love with her, is the most dangerous possible attitude of mind, just as compassionate pity for a young woman in distress, is dangerous to the peace of mind of the man cherishing it.

In this case both these dangers were present, and the worst of it was that circumstances now promised to compel a very close and frequent intercourse between the two persons concerned. Edna was an altogether charming young woman with whom any right-minded young man might easily fall in love, as many young men had already done to their sorrow and disappointment. Besides she had the low, distinct, contralto voice which was one of the chief fascinations of Virginia women.

On the other hand, Phil Shenstone had high character, chivalric manners, a brilliant mind, a pleasingly wide acquaintance with men and affairs, a shapely person and an unusually handsome head. Besides, he was altogether the best dressed man, in an unpretentious way, who had ever been seen in that part of Virginia. That is something that always counts for much in the eyes of women.

These were the conditions of the problem presented by the coming intimate and sympathetic association of this young man and this young woman. Who could say what answer to it they were likely to work out together?

Almost any observant Virginia dame would have made a confident conjecture. But human life and human character are complex, and even the wisest of dames sometimes find themselves at fault in prediction.

XXX

IT was not quite midnight when Greg Tazewell, six hours late, rode up to the Woodlands door at a swinging gallop. Phil and Valorie were waiting for him. Phil welcomed his coming with cordiality; Valorie with an enthusiastic delight which she made no effort to conceal, and which Phil observed with feelings that he did not care to analyze.

The young doctor threw aside his hat, overcoat and gloves, and began at once to question the other two as to the patient's condition. Having satisfied himself that there was no immediate occasion for interference on his part, and learning that Colonel Shenstone was sleeping, though uneasily, he seemed to dismiss all concern from his mind, in behalf of his own needs.

"Can I have a bite to eat?" he asked, turning to Valorie; "I've had no supper, and no

dinner worth mentioning either, for that matter."

A fleeting shadow of annoyance passed over Valorie's face as she answered coldly:

"I supposed you'd be hungry, and I've already ordered some supper for you. But won't you go in and see Uncle Butler first?"

"Not to-night. It isn't necessary, and it is better not to wake him. After I've appeased the pangs of hunger by some slices of cold ham, I'll prepare a quieting draught which you may give him if you find him very restless and wakeful at any time. I'll see him in the morning."

This time Phil Shenstone happened to be looking at Valorie and saw another and more pronounced look of annoyance appear for a brief moment in her countenance, as she mentally ejaculated:

"How brutally cold-blooded you are!"

But as the words were not spoken Phil could in no wise interpret the look and he thought it on the whole unnecessary to do so.

When Tazewell's supper appeared and he sat down in the dining room to enjoy it, the

very relish with which the hungry man ate annoyed the girl, and when, instead of making the invalid the subject of conversation, he indulged his laughing propensity by giving a humorous account of his journey, she rose with dignity and said:

"If you will excuse me, I'll go to my patient. You may leave the soothing draught with Sylvia, if you please, after you have finished your supper and before you go to bed. Mr. Phil, you'll show Dr. Tazewell to his room, will you not? *I* have duties in the sick room."

This time there was no doubt that Valorie was angry, or deeply offended, or at the very least "vexed," to employ a favorite feminine term.

"Great Scott, what have I done?" exclaimed Greg, laying down his fork and looking at Phil, in amazement. "She's in a fury with me, and I can't guess why. Can you?"

"No. Her mood is one I have never seen in her before. Perhaps you've not done anything, but omitted to do something. She's very tired, poor girl, and the strain of waiting

for you has taxed her nerves sorely. I think we shall find her in a calmer temper in the morning. At any rate there's nothing to be done to-night. Fill a pipe."

Phil argued that this was merely one of those little manifestations of temper which often vex the intercourse of plighted lovers, and as such, a thing of no consequence. Perhaps Valorie felt that in his first eagerness for news of the patient, Greg had responded less cordially than he ought to her glad greeting. "In any case," he thought, "it is none of my business, and they'll patch it up the first time they are alone together."

As the two friends smoked, Tazewell asked:

"Have those people made any move in my absence?"

"None that we know of, though it has been a week now since that shyster was here."

"Yes, I know. Perhaps he is gathering himself up for a spring. We must be prepared at all points. There has been enough mischief done already."

"How do you mean?"

"Why in my opinion Colonel Shenstone's

present attack is due in its severity at least to the anger that fellow aroused. By the way if they make any move while the attack continues, we must carefully keep the fact from his knowledge, no matter how imperative it may seem to tell him of it. Please bear that in mind, Phil. It is of vital importance."

"I'll take care of that. But now, my dear fellow, you ought to go to bed. You're worn out with your journey."

"Yes, and I must be fresh in the morning. Will you send some one to pour cold water over me when you have me waked? Good-night. You needn't climb the stairs. I know my way to my room."

During his steamboating career, Phil Shenstone had used himself to sleeping at irregular hours. The time of day or night when he slept or woke was a matter of indifference to him. Just now he was not minded to sleep. His spirit was perturbed in many ways, and he had many perplexing things to think of. He greatly longed to go away to the West again and plunge headlong into affairs that

would leave him no time for thought of other than external things. But his uncle's illness and Valorie's danger bound him to his present surroundings. On his uncle's recovery he would still have Valorie's story to relate for the old lawyer's guidance, and even when that should be done, he must not leave Virginia while Edna Spottswood's affairs were in their present tangle.

Irritated by the restraints with which circumstances thus bound him, and still more by his inability to cast off the bonds, it would have been torture to him to go to bed. It was still late winter, according to the calendar, but the weather was softly warm and there was a late rising moon. He refilled his pipe and strolled out into the house grounds for the sake of air and exercise. When the pipe burned out he replenished it from the tobacco jar which he had placed in the porch against such need. He had no matches, of course. It was not the custom in those days for gentlemen to carry matches or to light their pipes otherwise than with a coal of fire. In winter

the coals were plentiful in the open fireplaces which were in every room. In summer there were sure to be little negro boys about who could be sent to the kitchen — a detached building always — for the needed coal. Neither of these resources was open to Phil in the small hours of the morning, but it was easy for him to stroll out to the kitchen and help himself.

On one of these excursions he found Aunt Kizzie, the cook, awake and sitting up on her pallet. She was one of many negroes who could never be persuaded to sleep in a bed. She and other like-minded ones, preferred to doze before a partially dying fire, sitting in a chair or stretched upon a quilt on the earthen floor, and waking now and then to smoke a pipe or to go out and look at the stars to see what time it was. Their skill in telling time in that way was so considerable that their opinions were more trustworthy than those of many of the clocks of that period.

Aunt Kizzie was a privileged character, especially in the case of Phil Shenstone, to whom she often said:

"Why chile, I *raised* yo' father."

On this occasion she assailed Phil with a question:

"What's yo' a doin', Mas' Phil, prowlin' roun' dis heah time o' night? Why ain't yo' in yo' baid?"

"Well, why aren't you in yours, Aunt Kizzie?"

"Now look heah, chile, doan you go to be axin' me no questions. I asked yo' what yo' is a-doin' prowlin' roun' dis time o' night."

"I am smoking, Aunt Kizzie."

"Ain't I got no eyes?" she asked scornfully. "What for yo' answer me like dat? Is yo' a thinkin' o' little Miss Valorie?"

"I'm thinking of a good many things, Aunt Kizzie."

"Is Miss Valorie dun give yo' de sack?"

"No, Aunt Kizzie."

"Den why doan' you go to baid like a Christian?"

"Why don't you, Aunt Kizzie?"

"Mas' Phil, yo's de perplexin'est an' mos' tormentin'est chile *I* eber raised. Git out o' heah, now, an' let me git a nap; ef yo' don't

I'll throw de skillet lids at yo' an' de skillets too. Do yo' heah?"

Thus admonished and with a genuine regard for Aunt Kizzie's nap, Phil retired to the porch, just as the darkness gave place to the dawn. His legs were a trifle weary with the night-long strolling, so buttoning his coat against the chill of the early morning, he sat down in one of the heavy oaken chairs with which the porch was furnished. Not long afterwards, between the daylight and the sunrise, Valorie appeared.

"I have slept very little and very badly," she said by way of explanation. "I feel the need of the open air. How good it smells. But what are you doing out here at this hour, Mr. Phil?"

"That's what Aunt Kizzie asked me when I went to the kitchen to light my pipe a while ago," he replied.

"Didn't you sleep well?"

"I haven't slept at all, Val. I haven't been in bed."

"Are you ill?" she asked with a note of

sincere anxiety which was distinctly pleasing to Phil.

"Not at all. I was never better in my life. But I'm very irregular in my sleeping habits, and when Greg went to bed I didn't feel like sleeping, so I came out to enjoy the fine night. How did Uncle Butler sleep?"

"Thank you," she said, gratified to discover that Phil was not indifferent, as she believed Greg Tazewell to be. "Thank you, fairly well, since I gave him the soothing draught at four minutes after two."

Valorie had an unusual habit of exactitude in all her statements. If asked the time she would give it not in round figures — as most persons did at that time when neither clocks nor watches could be depended upon for accuracy — but exactly according to the clock. When laughed at for this she would reply:

"It is just as easy to say 'sixteen minutes after' or 'seventeen minutes before' as to say fifteen in either case. I like to tell the truth, that's all."

"He's sleeping very quietly now," she

added, "and I hope Dr. Tazewell will find him in fair condition — whenever he gets ready to see him."

Phil observed the pause and the vexation in her tone, as she added that last phrase, but he found it difficult to interpret her mood. It was apparent that she was displeased with Greg, but why or to what extent, he could not make out.

"I sincerely hope so," he responded. "I'm sure Uncle Butler is not nearly so ill as he was during the last attack — not so ill by any means as I feared he would be. But you'll get chilled standing here. Let's take a little walk. There are some crocuses or daffodils already blooming out there by the walnut trees; I couldn't make out which they are in the dim moonlight. Let's go and see."

XXXI

AS they inspected the profusely blooming bed of new-born flowers, Phil gathered a handful of them and presented them to his companion, saying gallantly:

"They are bright and golden. May your life be always like them, Val."

A moment passed before she could trust herself to speak. Then she said:

"Thank you, Mr. Phil, for the flowers and still more for the wish. I'll put them in water and set them where Uncle Butler will see them when he wakes."

After a brief pause she said:

"Mr. Phil, there are some things I want to say to you. I wanted to say them when you were leaving me in town, but — well, you had to hurry, you know, to catch your train, and there has been no opportunity since then.

Mr. Phil, I shall never leave Uncle Butler so long as he lives. You have no idea how he depends upon me for his happiness. He began to get better, you know, the moment I got back to Woodlands, and every time he wakes he asks if I am there, for he doesn't see very well and I keep the room darkened. When I say: 'Yes, Uncle, I'm here,' he takes my hand and caresses it and says something so loving that it makes me very happy and sets me crying. He needs me all the time. It isn't because of anything I do for him — for anybody else could do all that — but just because he loves me and likes to have me with him."

"Yes, I know all that, Val, and I rejoice in it far more than I can tell you. He is the best man in the world, I think, and you have brought a new light into his darkened life. You can never do a better thing, Val, or one better worth while, no matter how long you may live."

Forgetting for the moment the reserve she had of late felt it necessary to practice in her intercourse with Phil, Valorie took his hand

and gently pressed it in lieu of spoken answer to his words.

It was a critical moment for Phil Shenstone. But he remembered Greg Tazewell, and he remembered his own obligation to acquit himself well as a loyal gentleman and friend. So conquering his momentary impulse to declare his love, just as she, remembering herself, withdrew her hand from his, he said:

"Go on, Val. You had something more to say to me."

"Yes," she answered. "Have those people done anything more?"

"Not yet. I suppose they are preparing some sort of surprise for us."

"They might as well spare themselves the trouble."

"How do you mean, Val?"

"Why I mean that no matter what they do, and no matter what any court may order, I will never go to them, never, never, never! I know what they want — or at least a part of it. I heard about it in the convent. They want to put me on the stage to earn money for

them. They mean then to sell me to some rich man as his wife. Now let me tell you that even if they should seize me by force, they would get no good out of it. I would never play a note or dance a step for them. They might beat me, but it would make no difference. They might put me in jail, and it would make no difference. They might torture me as some of the saints were tortured, but it would make no difference. I may belong to them — though I don't know why or how — but my fingers and toes are my own, and it is my fingers and toes they want. So what is the use?"

The girl did not speak excitedly. Her voice was calm and level. There was no catching of the breath, no smallest hurry in her enunciation, no suggestion of hysteria in her manner, but there was a resolute determination there which must have been discouraging to her adversaries had they heard her words. She went on:

"And I will not run away like a coward, either. I will not go North or to Europe to escape them. I shall stay right here at Wood-

lands to make Uncle Butler happy until they attempt to seize me. Mr. Phil, I want you please to buy me a good Colt's revolver — for self-defense."

"You have no need of that," he answered. "Listen, Val!"

He took her hand and held it while he spoke.

"Those people will not resort to any form of violence. They know better. And if they did — am I not here, and isn't Greg at hand? We should meet violence with violence. But I assure you they are not thinking of anything so desperate as that."

"Then why do you keep your negro sentinels on guard, Mr. Phil?"

"I ought to have told you about that, but I didn't think of your misinterpreting it. They are there simply to prevent anybody from serving papers on Uncle Butler by leaving them at his house while he is ill. When he gets well again the sentries will be withdrawn. I supposed you understood that."

"No. I thought you feared somebody would seize me by force."

"Nobody would think of such a thing, Val. It would mean a long term in State prison, to say nothing of the chance of being shot in the attempt — a chance which I should do my best to convert into a certainty. No, there is no danger of that kind, and I don't think there is much danger of any kind. I'm not a lawyer, of course, but I think I can say very confidently that when those people serve papers as I suppose they will do, we can beat them in the courts, particularly after I get a chance to give Uncle Butler all the facts."

"Thank you for telling me, Mr. Phil," she replied. Then after a pause,

"What if we couldn't beat them in the courts? What if it should be decided that I belong to those people? Would the court compel me to go with them? I've told you they should never get any good out of me, but should I be compelled to go with them?"

"Not for long," he answered resolutely.

"How —'not for long?'"

"Why I'd kidnap you again. You know I kidnapped you before, so I'm a hardened criminal in that way. I'd do it again with-

in twenty-four hours after they got you."

"Yes, I believe you would. Thank you. I'm happier now," she said. "My mind is relieved."

"You have no doubt that I would do what I have said?" he asked.

"Doubt? No. You are brave and strong. and good; I could never doubt you in any way. But I must go to Uncle Butler now. He'll be awake very soon if he isn't so already. — Mr. Phil?"

"What is it, Val?"

"Do you suppose Dr. Tazewell would mind *very* much if you had him waked this early in the morning? I still believe in his skill and judgment, and I want him to see Uncle Butler just as soon as he can be persuaded to do so."

Her way of putting the matter seemed to Phil a strange one, but he made no effort to guess its meaning. In her present mood toward Greg Tazewell she was beyond his fathoming. Instead of trying to interpret the speech, therefore, he answered it:

"I am sure he is as anxious to see his pa-

tient as we are to have him do so. I'll have him waked at once, and I'll have a servant pour half a dozen buckets of cold water over him."

"What for?"

"To freshen him up. He asked me last night to do so. You may depend he'll have all his wits about him after that. I think I'll try the same treatment myself, after Greg sees Uncle Butler. It'll give me an appetite for breakfast."

As she glided into the house she paused upon the doorsill and turning to him, said:

"Thank you again for all, Mr. Phil. I think you are better than *anybody*."

"Is it quite loyal of you to say that, Val — giving me first place in your esteem?"

"Oh, I except Uncle Butler, of course," she answered over her shoulder as she retreated.

Again Phil was puzzled.

"I wonder how far she will carry her pique. I'm afraid there is trouble ahead for Greg."

XXXII

DR. TAZEWELL found Colonel Shenstone in much better condition than he had feared, and at the end of his examination he reported that recovery was already well begun.

"You had better keep your bed for a day or two more," he said to his patient. "It isn't well to sit up too soon, but with the treatment I'm going to give you, I hope to see you 'clothed and in your right mind' not many days hence. I must warn you, however, to keep yourself in your right mind if you don't want to come down again. You musn't fly into a passion again, as you did with that lawyer. That is what bowled you over this time."

Instantly Valorie responded:

"Dr. Tazewell, you've no right to scold Uncle Butler and I beg that you will not do

it again. He has a right to grow angry when he is insulted as he was by that man."

"I sincerely beg pardon, Miss Page. I didn't mean to 'scold' Colonel Shenstone. I only meant to warn him."

"Come here, Little Minx," said the old gentleman. "You mustn't scold the doctor, or you'll make us think you are a little minx in the dictionary sense. He is perfectly right, and I shall not allow myself to fly into a passion again, now that I have you here to do all that for me. But now you must go to your room and go regularly to bed for a good, long sleep. You're tired out, and I won't have it so. You are to do as I tell you, or I'll fly into another passion and give the doctor a new grip on me. Go to bed at once, and don't get up for six hours at the least."

"I'll go, Uncle, as soon as the gentlemen have had their breakfast."

"Confound the gentlemen and their breakfast! Let them look out for themselves with the help of the servants, as I had to do for more years than you have lived — when I

hadn't my Little Minx to coddle and spoil me."

"But who'll make the coffee, Uncle?"

"I will," said Phil. "I'm an expert."

"Why, how did you learn to do that?"

"By watching a young lady do it — a young lady whom I call Val. I confess I wasn't specially concerned with the details of the process, but the accessories interested me."

"The accessories? What do you mean?"

"Why the grace of the young lady, the plumpness of her elbows and all that, and besides —"

Valorie interrupted him, not caring to hear more.

"I'll go to bed at once, Uncle Butler. I can sleep sweetly now that the doctor pronounces you so much better. I should have slept last night if he could have reässured me in that way before he went to bed. Doctor, I beg your pardon if I spoke crossly a little while ago. Perhaps I'm nervous, though that isn't ever a good excuse. Good morning, Uncle. Adieu, gentlemen. I've given special orders

to the cook to have your breakfast served early. I don't suppose she'll do anything of the kind, but I've given the orders any how."

She was half way through the doorway as she spoke the last words, and a few seconds later she was safe above stairs. Manifestly she had no mind to listen to any response Dr. Tazewell might feel moved to make to her hurried apology, or to the vicious little stab she had given him in her last speech.

"That's a flag of truce, at any rate," thought Phil. "They'll make it up next time they meet."

But apparently Dr. Tazewell was beset by no great eagerness to have the meeting an early one for while he and Phil were at breakfast, he announced his purpose to ride over to his own plantation as soon as the meal should be over.

"I suppose my presence there is badly needed just now," he said in explanation. "I've been absent for more than a week now — yes, for nearly a fortnight,— and there's no knowing in what condition things are by this time. Colonel Shenstone needs nothing now

but good nursing and the medicines I've left for him. There is no need for me to see him again for a day or two, unless some unfavorable symptom should show itself and I do not expect that. If it should happen, send for me at once, Phil. Otherwise I'll devote a day or two to my own neglected affairs."

Beyond promising to do as requested, Phil said nothing. But mentally he reflected:

"So you think it is your turn to sulk do you? I don't envy you the penance you'll have to do for that. But it isn't my affair."

XXXIII

DURING the three days in which Greg Tazewell did not think it necessary to visit his patient Colonel Shenstone rapidly improved, but Valorie's temper, so far as the doctor was concerned underwent no such change for the better.

The displeasure she had felt and manifested was due solely, as we know, to what she interpreted as indifference on his part to Colonel Shenstone's case, and his failure to visit the patient each day seemed to her to confirm and emphasize that indifference. She knew nothing of Greg Tazewell's real motive in remaining away from Woodlands as long as his duty to his patient would allow. How should she know that his absence was prompted by chivalric regard for herself and an excessive loyalty to his friend Phil Shenstone? How should she know that Greg Tazewell had not

yet conquered his love for her? Her rejection of his suit had been kindly, considerate and very gentle, but it had been so firm and so positive as to leave him no ground of hope in that direction. Was he not a strong, resolute man? Was it not clearly his duty as well as his interest to put aside all thought of winning her and to conquer a passion so manifestly hopeless? Firmly believing that he had done so, she could have no inkling of the motives of his present conduct. She could only attribute his voluntary absence from Colonel Shenstone's bedside to that indifference which she mistakenly believed he had shown in his omission to examine his patient on the night of his arrival, and still more in the lightness of his conversation at the supper table that night.

It was with a dignity that left little room for friendly cordiality, therefore, that she received him when on the morning of the fourth day he rode over to Woodlands. So marked was her coldness indeed that Phil Shenstone, in loyalty to his supposed obligations, was at pains to take himself out of the way.

"I must give them a chance to make it up," he reflected, and with that intent, as soon as Greg had passed favorably upon his uncle's condition, he said to him:

"Greg, I have some important matters to attend to over at Mattapony. Indeed I've been needed there for several days. Of course you'll remain for dinner at Woodlands, and so, if you don't mind being left, I'll ride over there for an hour or two."

Without waiting for Greg to offer the excuses that were near his lips, he sprang into the saddle and rode rapidly away.

Greg's first feeling was one of annoyance, but upon reflection he was rather glad to have this opportunity to "have it out" with Valorie. He was anxious to learn precisely what his offense in her eyes had been, and to atone for it if possible. For a brief moment the thought flitted through his mind that perhaps after all Valorie was not so far different from other young women as he had supposed; that perhaps she had expected the compliment of a second proposal. But he promptly dismissed the suggestion not only as unworthy but as

absurdly unlikely, in view of the very positive way in which she had entreated him not to return to that subject again. Moreover, nothing could be clearer, he thought, than that she had given her heart to Phil Shenstone and that he was in honor bound to recognize and respect an engagement of which he felt sure, although it had not been announced or even hinted at in any way.

After Phil had gone Valorie joined Greg in the parlor, by way of doing her duty as hostess, and still more for the purpose of receiving his instructions as nurse.

These were brief and simple, relating chiefly to diet, and when he had finished giving them, Greg turned to her with an anxious face, saying:

"You are angry with me, Miss Valorie. Would you mind telling me why?"

"I am not angry with you; at least I don't think I am. I have been displeased, and perhaps I have shown my displeasure more than I should. If so I beg you to forgive me, remembering how anxious I have been about Uncle Butler."

"I forgive you freely," he replied, "if there is anything to forgive, which I do not admit, though I must own that you have made me suffer somewhat."

"I am sorry," she said, and after the briefest possible pause she added, "for the occasion."

"Would you mind telling me what the occasion has been? What is it I have done to displease you?"

"I supposed you understood," she answered with a touch of surprise.

"Indeed I do not, though I have tried hard to conjecture what it all meant. Tell me, please."

"I thought you indifferent to Uncle Butler's suffering," she answered frankly, adding: "and candidly I think so still."

"How can you have thought such a thing as that? And how can you think it now? Certainly nothing could be further from the fact. There is no man living whom I reckon so dear a friend as Colonel Shenstone, no man for whom I would do more or sacrifice more. Believe me I speak the truth."

"I believe that of course, because you say it. You are a gentleman and of course you speak only the truth. I must have misconstrued your conduct."

"Very certainly you have. I cannot even imagine what conduct of mine you could have construed to mean or to suggest indifference on my part to Colonel Shenstone's welfare or comfort. Tell me please."

"I must, of course, though after what you have said, it seems an ungracious thing to do."

"I'll overlook the seeming ungraciousness, if you'll only tell me and give me an opportunity to explain."

"There have been several things," she said, as if recalling the occurrences, one by one. "You responded as promptly as possible to my summons. I give you credit for that — or rather I should say I have given you credit for that from the first and all the time."

"I deserve no credit for that. The response was as much to my own eager desire as to your summons. I was far from my hotel when I received your despatch, and there was not time in which to return there if I was

to catch the next train. In my anxiety to reach Colonel Shenstone's bedside as soon as possible, I left New York without returning to the hotel and without so much as a handbag."

"Thank you for that. But when you got here, you were in no hurry to go to his bedside. You waited to eat and even to sleep first."

"And you attributed that to indifference?"

"What else could I think?"

"My dear Miss Valorie, I thought you understood. I had closely questioned you and Phil about his condition; I had learned everything that could have significance; I knew that sleep was his only immediate need, and you told me he was sleeping. In my judgment as a physician it was altogether best for him that he should not be disturbed, but that sleep should be encouraged by the draught I left with you, to be given if he should wake during the night. It was not indifference but concern for his welfare that prompted me."

"Yes, I can see that now," she answered, "and perhaps I should have seen it at the time but for the other things."

"What were they?"

"Why — it isn't easy to explain what I mean — but while you were taking your supper, you seemed to forget all about Uncle Butler's case; you talked lightly and jestingly, and it hurt me. Perhaps I was over sensitive at the time, but I had been so anxious!"

"You will believe me when I tell you that I talked as I did about other things solely for your sake?"

"How so?"

"A physician, if he is at all wise, carries with him many remedies besides medicines. After the strain of your anxiety for your uncle, and your eagerness for me to be here to attend him, you were in a dangerously overwrought condition of nerves. I felt it necessary to reassure you concerning Colonel Shenstone, and it was for that purpose that I talked lightly of other subjects, avoiding all mention of his illness. I thought my manner would do more to reassure you than any words of confidence I might speak. Can you not understand that and believe it?"

"I understand it now, and of course I believe whatever you tell me. But I did not un-

derstand at the time, and when you left right after breakfast next morning, and did not return for three days, I was sure of your indifference."

Here was the hardest point that Greg had been called upon to meet. In the very nature of the case he could not tell her all of the truth, but at least he could truthfully say:

"I was entirely sure that Colonel Shenstone needed nothing but to continue the treatment and regimen I had prescribed for him. Unless there should be some change for the worse — and I asked Phil to notify me in that case — there was not the slightest occasion for me to see him during the next three days. He was in good hands and getting well, and my own affairs badly needed my attention."

"I have been very unjust to you, Dr. Tazewell," said the girl, taking his hand, "and I sincerely ask you to forgive me."

"Don't let us talk of forgiveness. It was dull in me not to see how easily you might misunderstand, especially in your over-wrought condition. I should have realized that. I should have taken pains to explain to you.

The fault was all my own. Let us be good friends again!"

"With all my heart. You can imagine that this conversation has been anything but pleasant to me, especially in its beginning. But I'm glad to have had it. It has relieved my mind, and acquitted you of an unjust accusation. We are the best of good friends again, and I'm going to volunteer a promise: If ever again I find myself disposed to accuse you, I'm going to tell you so, frankly. Then you can set me right if I am wrong."

It was high time now for Valorie to go to her household duties, and she did so with a feeling of gladness and relief that was very grateful to her spirit. As the day was fine, sunny and spring-like, Greg betook himself to the porch, where with a pipe he found himself happier than he had been for weeks past.

Once as Valorie crossed the hall he called to her, saying:

"It occurs to me that it might be an agreeable change for Colonel Shenstone if he came out and sat with us at dinner to-day. Ask him, please. A little cheery companionship

will do him more good now than anything else, and as his chamber is on this floor there are no stairs to tire him."

"Oh, thank you, very, very much. I'm sure Uncle Butler will be greatly pleased. He told me this morning how weary he was of the confinement, and I've been wishing he might come out for awhile, but I hardly dared ask it. I wonder if my wishing made you think of it?"

"Perhaps so. I don't know. At any rate you see how true it is that a doctor must carry around with him many remedies besides those in his saddle bags."

XXXIV

WHEN Phil Shenstone returned just before the four o'clock dinner, he observed so great an amelioration of relations between Greg and Valorie that he confidently expected to be informed of their engagement before nightfall. He had seen too much of human conduct in the various relations of life not to know that when even a friendship has been subjected to strain and then repaired it is pretty sure to become stronger than ever. Especially he knew that a lover's tiff reconciled is apt to intensify the love that has existed all the while.

He thought it possible that until now the relations of these two might have been undefined, but he was confident that if such had been the case, the reconciliation which had so obviously taken place must have brought definition with it.

His reasoning was sound enough. His conclusions were wrong only because the reasoning was based upon a mistaken assumption. Seeing no reason to doubt the correctness of that assumption he rested confidently in his conclusions, and when the day and evening had passed away without bringing the expected announcement, he was distinctly bewildered and even a trifle offended. It seemed to him that his friendship for both persons concerned deserved more of confidence than either of them had shown.

His uncle's presence at the table was gratifying, of course, as proof of his rapid convalescence, and from the smiling cheerfulness with which the old gentleman joined in the conversation, he argued that the facts of the situation had been communicated to him, as was of course his due.

When he congratulated Colonel Shenstone upon his improvement, the elder man replied:

"Beyond the necessity of obeying Greg's orders as to diet and the like for a few days more, I'm going to regard myself as a well man now, quite well enough, my dear boy, to

hear the things you came all the way from the West to tell me. When will you do it, Phil?"

"Whenever Dr. Tazewell permits," answered Phil, looking inquiringly at his friend.

"Not quite yet," replied the man of science. "Not for two or three days to come, Colonel Shenstone, and not even then if you are imprudent and bring on any renewal of the trouble. We must go a little slow as yet. When dinner is over I'm going to ask Miss Valorie to have you put to bed again. You are naturally very weak still, and must have plenty of rest. I'll ride over day after to-morrow and have a look at you." Then turning to Valorie he added: "It will not be necessary to see him to-morrow, and really I have a good many things to do. You don't think —"

"I think only that you know best in such a case, and I'm very sure you wish to do what is best."

Observing the looks that passed between the two — looks that suggested some special understanding — Phil thought it wise to change the subject.

"What is the legal rate of interest in Virginia, Uncle? Can you tell me off hand and without trouble?"

"Yes, certainly. Where no rate is specified, it is six per cent. By contract, a higher rate, up to ten per cent. may be fixed."

"And all above that? —"

"Is usury."

"And therefore illegal?"

"Worse than illegal. It works a forfeiture even of the principal of the debt."

"You mean that if a man takes a note or bond carrying more than ten per cent. interest, he cannot collect any interest at all?"

"More than that. He cannot collect either interest or principal. He forfeits the whole thing."

"Thank you. On a note carrying a lawful rate of interest, does the interest compound if not paid annually?"

"Certainly not. Why all these questions, Phil?"

"Oh, I'm only arming myself for possible emergencies."

"Why, *you* are not involved in debt, Phil, surely?"

"Not a red cent. I wish your health, Uncle Butler, was in as sound a condition as my financial affairs are. But some other people are in trouble, and they are being robbed by rascals. The game is an interesting one, and now that you've given me the information, I propose to 'sit in' as they say at poker. You're pale, Uncle, and you look tired. Don't you think you've sat up long enough?"

"I am a trifle tired, but I want to hear all about this."

"Not now, Colonel Shenstone," interrupted Greg. "Phil is right, and you must go back to your bed at once."

"Yes, uncle," said Valorie, going to him and persuasively caressing his wan cheeks, "you know you are to obey the doctor so that we may soon have you well again."

"So you join forces with my enemies, do you, Little Minx? Well, I can't resist your imperious will, and I'm strictly forbidden to grow angry, so there's nothing for it but to

retreat in good order. But confound you, you young jackanapeses, if I were well enough I'd prosecute you both for conspiracy against an unoffending old man."

And with a look of affection at them all, he suffered his body servant to lead him back to his chamber. Both the young men rose to perform that service in the negro man's stead, but the old gentleman ordered them back to their places, playfully reminding them that it is very ill-bred for a gentleman to quit the table so long as his hostess remains.

"Unless his tyrannical doctor compels the rudeness," he added, laughing a little.

XXXV

IT was Greg Tazewell's purpose to return to his plantation soon after dinner, but Phil asked him to remain until after supper, saying that he wished to consult him concerning a business matter of pressing importance.

When the two were alone, Phil said:

"I want you to give me the address of the ablest lawyer in Richmond, if you know who he is, Greg."

"I will certainly. But what's the matter?"

"Two very different things — one concerning myself and the other concerning other people. I shall at once retain the lawyer in both matters. You see how my uncle is failing, of course. Now in both these matters he will want to act for me, but it won't do to let him engage in laborious and perhaps exciting work, and I mean to forestall his insistence by having

my lawyer already retained. I can explain it by reminding him that he was ill when the necessity arose and that I had no choice but to retain another lawyer."

"Is it your purpose to tell me of the matters involved?"

"Yes, certainly. That is what I wanted you to remain for. In one way or another I may want some assistance from you, and at any rate I shall want your advice now and then. The first matter is that of Mrs. Spottswood's affairs. I've been going over her papers and the confused jumble of memoranda which she calls her 'accounts,' and I find that some rascals are swindling her shamefully. I mean to put a stop to it. That is why I asked Uncle Butler the questions I did about rates of interest and the like. I find that even her commission merchant has been compounding the ten per cent. interest on the unpaid debts of the late Major Spottswood. I'll have a speedy reckoning with him. Worse still, on the plea that he must have payments made on the debt to him he has persuaded Mrs. Spottswood to borrow of the money lenders for that

purpose, giving her notes for the amounts. As she didn't at all know how to do such business he offered to manage it for her, and the rascal has made her sign notes bearing, under a disguise, twelve, and in one case, as high as fifteen per cent. interest. To secure these, he induced her to give a deed of trust on her plantation and if somebody hadn't intervened she would have been sold out pretty soon."

"But why didn't Colonel Shenstone stop that?"

"He knew nothing about it. Until a few days before his first severe attack she did not consult him except as to crops and the like. Then she merely asked him to look into her affairs at his convenience, saying she feared she had managed them badly, and before he had time to do so, he fell ill. After his recovery he mentioned the matter to me, evidently not regarding it as pressing. So nobody knew the real condition of affairs till I went over there this morning. I have a good many more details to consider still, but I've got at the worst, and I'm going to put the thing into a lawyer's hands, secure a binding

power of attorney, so that no scruples of Mrs. Spottswood's shall stand in the way, and instruct the lawyer to proceed for the forfeiture of every dollar of debt made fraudulently or usuriously. In such a case the two words mean the same thing."

"But who is the commission merchant?"

"Thank heaven he is not a Virginian. He's a New Yorker, a member of a Produce Exchange firm up there, and heaven only knows what tricks he may have played in the sale of Mrs. Spottswood's crops. I shall look into that, and I mean to drive the fellow out of Richmond."

"Oh, of course."

"Now the other matter concerns Valorie's case, or rather it concerns me in connection with that case. Those sharp practitioners have not been idle. I received a letter from them this morning. There it is, read it aloud."

Greg took the missive, which was very formal, with the legend "*in re* Lee vs. Shenstone" written in the upper left hand corner

of the sheet. After the formal address, the letter went on thus:

"You are doubtless aware that we have been retained as counsel for Mrs. Eulalie Lee, and instructed to institute such proceedings in the courts as may be necessary to secure her right to the custody of her infant daughter, one Valorie Page,— of whom, during her minority, she is the natural guardian,— or compensation for the loss of her services, which have a peculiar value because of the child's special gifts and training.

"It is the uniform policy of our firm to seek the amicable settlement of such cases out of court, and to that end, as you have doubtless been informed, we have already approached Colonel Butler Shenstone, who, as we are informed and believe, has present custody of the child and is detaining her from the control of her rightful guardian.

"In any ordinary case our next step would of course be to invoke the aid of the proper courts for the enforcement of our client's rights. But there are certain special circum-

stances in this case which make us reluctant to do so. Without entering into details, it is perhaps sufficient for us to say that the abduction of a minor child is a crime at law both in Louisiana where the system known as the civil law obtains and in Virginia where the common law prevails. Of that fact you may or may not be aware; but as we understand that you are not a lawyer, you probably do not know the following facts:

"1. That the crime of abduction is an extraditable offense among the states of this Union;

"2. That the offense is a continuous one, running so long as the abducted person is held in custody either by the abductor or by any other person in his behalf or at his instigation; and

"3. That where an abducted child is taken from the state in which the offense was committed and carried into another state a charge of abduction will lie in either state.

"A prosecution for a criminal offense is so serious a matter, especially where the person prosecuted is a man of high social position

and repute, that we shrink from instituting proceedings of that nature, and we certainly do not intend to do so, if the rights of our client can be even measurably secured without resort to measures so extreme and so disagreeable. In our effort to accomplish a more peaceful adjustment, we ask you, sir, to meet us half way. If you will appoint an early day for a meeting between yourself and ourselves in our office, we are confident that an arrangement can be agreed upon for avoiding those extremely disagreeable measures which, in the absence of some such adjustment, our duty to our client would compel us to take. Awaiting your reply, etc."

"That's a threat," said Greg, handing the letter back to Phil; "a carefully disguised threat, but still a threat."

"Of course it is. But it is also a 'bluff' and as such a confession of weakness."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Why, don't you see that all their palaver about reluctance to do disagreeable things is a falsehood on the face of it? Those precious rascals are in no wise troubled by scruples of

conscience or scruples of any other kind. A court proceeding, if successful, would enable them to collect much larger fees than any compromise could. They do not bring proceedings simply because they do not believe they could win in that way. I was never so confident as I am now that they haven't a leg to stand on, and that they know it. So they are trying to scare me, and I don't scare."

"Still they might give you some trouble."

"I'm prepared for that."

"What have you replied?"

"Nothing, as yet. I'll run into town tomorrow, retain my lawyer, and then write referring these people to my counsel for their answer."

After a brief silence, Greg asked: "Did you kidnap the 'infant' as they call her?"

"I suppose I did. I don't know just what constitutes kidnapping in the eyes of the law. Anyhow they'll find a good deal of trouble to prove it. You see I never saw Valorie until she came to me at the Exchange hotel in Richmond."

"How did you manage it then?"

"I employed the creole woman, Nathalie, to get her and bring her to Richmond. She managed it very cleverly. Indeed, I think she'd manage a military campaign as cleverly as General Scott himself ever did. You see Nathalie was the nurse when Valorie was born, and had charge of her until she was six or seven years old. Then Val was taken away, Nathalie didn't know where. She was in fact put into the convent, and Nathalie, who was devoted to the child, mourned her almost as one dead. She appealed to Norman Page, Val's father, but he knew as little of his daughter's whereabouts as she did. He devoted a year or two to the search without success. He was tricked into the belief that she had been taken to France or Italy, and he went abroad to continue the search. It was not until he had spent his last dollar that he gave it up, returned to America, and went to steamboating again. As soon as he began to make money once more, he set Nathalie up in a little business of her own, as a clever maker of 'robes et confections,' her sign said — gowns and feminine things gen-

erally, you know. Less than a week before his death, Nathalie notified him by letter that she had found Val in the convent. He was running the upper rivers at the time, and he resigned his place, and hurried South, with me to help him. On the way he died, but I promised him to rescue Val and remove her to some safe place in Virginia. Never mind the details. You shall hear them all when I come to give Uncle Butler the facts, for now that these people are threatening me I may need your help and so I want you present at my conference with my uncle. Just now I see Valorie in the garden, superintending some early planting. Suppose we join her. Don't tell her anything of all this. Together, and with the aid of a good lawyer we can keep her out of that woman's clutches till she comes of age — or marries."

"Wait a moment, Phil," said Greg, anxiously. "I believe the law holds a man responsible for anything which he gets some one else to do for him, just the same as if he had done it himself. '*Qui facit per alium, facit per se,*' the law phrase runs."

"Yes, well? What about it?"

"Why suppose those people tamper with Nathalie?"

"They can't. She'd go to a gibbet before she would tell anything that might hurt Valorie."

"But suppose they put her on the witness stand —"

"They can't."

"Why not?"

"Because a negro is not allowed to testify against a white person in Virginia."

"Is she a negro, then? I thought you called her a creole?"

"She's a creole with what our law calls 'a visible admixture of African blood,' and she was born a slave. That's one ground of her gratitude to Valorie's father — that he set her free. Like a good many others of us Virginians, he didn't much like the slavery system, and he was especially averse to the enslavement of persons more nearly white than black. He insisted that people of mixed blood were fairly entitled to be reckoned white or black, accordingly as white or black blood

predominated in their veins. But there is enough of the negro in Nathalie to exclude her from the witness chair in this case. If there weren't they'd never get anything out of her. Come on, Val sees us and is waiting for us."

He was on the point of saying "you" instead of "us," but he did not.

XXXVI

GREG rode homeward as soon as supper was done, and the weather being still comfortably warm, Phil and Valorie sat together in the porch for a time, he smoking and she hugging herself to keep a voluminous nubia drawn around her shoulders as a protection against any possible chill.

"Mr. Phil," she said, wistfully, "when you come to tell Uncle Butler all the facts about me, you'll have to tell him about my father too, won't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so," he answered, reflectively; "yes, certainly. He will insist upon hearing every minute detail, and of course your father will come into the story."

"Then may I be there, Mr. Phil? I want to hear about my father."

He thought a moment before replying. Then he said:

"If you really wish it, Val, you shall be present, but I think perhaps you'd better not. Some of the details might be painful to you."

"But you said my father was not a bad man."

"He was not. On the contrary he was as good a man as I ever knew. I didn't mean that there was anything of that kind."

"Then please, I want to hear it all. None of the other things count with me."

"Very well," he said. "After all I do not see why anything I shall have to tell need distress you. I thought at first they might, but upon reflection —"

"Thank you, Mr. Phil. Please don't do any more reflecting. You might think of something else and change your mind again, and I do so greatly want to hear the story."

"Very well. You shall. I'll not change my mind; I promise you."

"Thank you — and good night, Mr. Phil."

Phil sat in the porch for an hour or more. He had a good many things to think of. First of all it occurred to him that it might be better not to visit the lawyer in Richmond on

the next day. His uncle might take it amiss if he should lay his facts before counsel without first consulting him. The old gentleman was apt to be sensitive on such points, and his two attacks of illness seemed to have sharpened his sensitiveness.

Then, too, Phil was not fully ready to consult the lawyer about the Spottswood affairs. There were a good many more papers to go over and arrange for submission to him before he could profitably do that. It would be better, he thought, for him to devote the next day to that task. Besides, Edna Spottswood would have to help him in that, and she was a particularly agreeable person to be with. It may have been that thought that decided him, or it may have been the more practical reasons he had already given himself for not going to Richmond and for going to Mattapony instead. However that may be, he ended his reflections with a decision to that effect.

"After all," he said to himself, "why should I hurry myself to answer those rascals? They can't do anything till they serve some sort of papers upon me. On the whole, I

think I won't answer them at all. Not being a lawyer, I might commit myself in some way. I'll consider it 'their move next,' as we say at draughts. I'm under no obligation to answer a threatening letter that covers an implied accusation. But I must be prepared to meet their next move, if they make one."

With that he rose and went to his room. There he prepared a brief letter, addressed to the lawyer he meant to employ. In it he enclosed a substantial check, asking the lawyer to consider himself retained in any and all cases that might arise affecting himself, or Valorie or Mrs. Spottswood. Giving the missive into the hands of a servant, to be sent to the station postoffice in the early morning, he took down his Ovid and read it for an hour —"just to get the taste out of my mouth," he said.

He had recovered almost too much of his Latin for that, however. He read it so easily now that the task did not drive other thoughts from his mind. He chuckled now and then to think of the vexation the lawyers who had written to him would feel at receiving no

answer. Then he wondered what they would do next. Then he thought of Edna Spottswood, and of Valorie, and wondered why Greg Tazewell didn't settle the whole trouble by marrying Valorie out of hand.

"Surely I gave him a plain enough hint today," he thought. Then he thought of Valorie again, in troubled fashion, this time, and gradually forgot about everybody else — even about Ovid.

After awhile he was waked by the sputtering of his candle which had burned out while he slept there on the lounge.

He had no other candle in the room, nor did he care for one. The weather had changed, and a terrific thunder storm had broken. He was in a mood to enjoy it, sitting in the darkness at his open window and watching for the successive lightning flashes. The wild tumult was in keeping with his own spirit's perturbation.

In that hour he marked out a future course of life for himself. He would put Mrs. Spottswood's affairs in order — he didn't think of Edna now that he had dreamed of

Valorie — and he would bring Valorie's case to a final issue of some sort. As soon as she should be safe from further danger of molestation, he would take himself out of the quiet, Virginia life, where it was too easy to think of the things he wished to forget. He would return to the West and with his own wealth, which was large, aided by the practically limitless capital which such a master man of affairs as he can always command, he would organize and bring to accomplishment those great schemes of transportation by land and water which had long lain waiting in his mind for opportunity. Now that the country was again on a sound financial basis, the opportunity had fully come. It needed only the man.

"And I am the man!" he said to himself, not vaingloriously but with confidence firmly founded upon his knowledge of his own, thoroughly proved ability.

"In that way, I shall be able to forget — perhaps."

Thus the storm within subsided, as that without had done.

XXXVII

WITH his mind fully made up to follow the course of life on which he had decided, Phil Shenstone was anxious to get away from Virginia as soon as possible. He did not understand the reticence of Greg and Valorie concerning their engagement — of which he had now no doubt — and it hurt him somewhat that they had not confided in him. But on the whole he was glad to have it so, and he hoped it might remain so until after his final departure for the West. It would spare him an embarrassment at least, for when he reflected upon the matter he was doubtful of his ability to receive such an announcement at the hands of either, with a reasonably controlled countenance.

In his haste to complete his work in Virginia, he devoted himself diligently next day

to the task that still remained to be done at Mattapony. Contrary to his purpose of the morning, he remained to dinner there in order to complete the work that day. In the early evening he returned to Woodlands bearing all the papers duly sorted, labeled and catalogued, together with a sweeping power of attorney authorizing him to act for Mrs. Spottswood on his own initiative.

On his return to Woodlands in time for the nine o'clock supper, he learned to his disappointment, that by his absence he had missed seeing Mrs. Albemarle, who had driven out from Richmond to see her former guardian and Valorie. She had had another purpose in view also. Now that Colonel Shenstone's speedy recovery seemed assured, she wanted to appoint an early date for the reception she meant to give to Valorie.

Incidentally her visit had done Colonel Shenstone a world of good.

" She kept him laughing half the time, and smiling all the time she was here," said Valorie, delighted. " You know how rippling and ceaseless her humor is, Mr. Phil. Are

you very, very tired, Mr. Phil?" she asked with concern, observing the weary look that shadowed his countenance.

"No — not very tired, Val. I've worked pretty hard over papers all day, but I reckon it is chiefly because I've been thinking and planning between whiles. I'll tell you, Val. I've decided to go West just as soon as I can get everything in good shape here and feel that you are safe from annoyance."

He was not looking at Valorie at the moment, and so he did not see the sudden pallor that overspread her face as he said this, or the hot flushing of the cheeks that followed.

"I am planning a great enterprise. The West is increasing rapidly in population and productiveness now, and very soon it must suffer for lack of adequate facilities for getting its products to market. I'm going to provide the transportation needed. I can command all the capital required. I'm going to organize a great steamboat and steamship company. We'll build steamboats as fast as we can, and we'll set up lines of ships from New Orleans to New York and to foreign countries. Per-

haps we shall do something in railroads too. Pardon me. You're not interested in such things. I've been 'talking shop' inexcusably. Has Greg been here to-day?"

"No. You know he was not to come until to-morrow. I do hope he'll find Uncle Butler well enough to hear what you have to tell him."

"So do I and I hope he, and the lawyer I'm going to consult, will soon discover a way to put an end to all uncertainty in the matter, so that I may the sooner get away. I am very anxious to do that. By the way, Val, please say nothing to anybody outside our own circle here, about Nathalie's agency in getting you out of the convent and bringing you to Virginia. It might get her into trouble."

"Get poor Nathalie into trouble? Why, how can it, Mr. Phil?"

The girl spoke anxiously.

"Oh, I don't know that it would, but it might."

"Mr. Phil," she said, very seriously. "You are keeping something back, and you promised not to do that with me, you know."

"Oh, it is nothing, except that those unscrupulous lawyers in Richmond are trying to scare money out of us by threatening to prosecute me for kidnapping you, and as they can't prove that charge they might decide to prosecute Nathalie, if they should find out just what she did in the matter. Of course they know I would never let her suffer for what I induced her to do for me, but they might try to get at me by threatening her. At present nobody knows anything about that but you and me. If we say nothing those blackmailers will never hear of it. I've told Greg about it of course, but he's as tight as a drum."

"But Mr. Phil, I'm afraid you've got yourself into a deal of trouble for my sake. What can they do to you?"

Her voice and manner betrayed so much of concern for him that under other circumstances than those that he confidently believed to exist, something decisive would have happened. As it was he addressed himself to the task of reassuring her.

"They can do nothing at all that need bother us, I think, Val."

"But what if they should? Oh, I am so wretched!"

"I tell you they can't. They can't bring evidence enough to bear, even to justify an indictment, much less to secure a conviction. And even if they should get me indicted and convicted, my lawyer would appeal the case and carry it finally to the Supreme Court of the United States. That would take from three to five years, and within less than three years you'll be of age and completely out of danger."

"Mr. Phil, that is very unkind of you — very unjust."

"What is, Val?"

"Why to suppose that I'm anxious about myself. It is for *you, you, you,* that I'm scared!"

It was Valorie's emotional habit thus to repeat words with increasing emphasis when she was greatly moved.

"Oh, don't worry on my account, Val. I assure you I'm completely bullet proof in this matter. Why, I haven't even answered the threatening letter those rascals sent me, and

I don't mean to. If they write again, I shall refer them to my lawyer for an answer. I'm twiddling my fingers at them."

In her anxiety for him the girl was quick to catch at his words and question them.

"Then you've engaged a lawyer?"

"Yes, one of the best in Virginia."

"Mr. Phil that means that you really are in danger. You're trying to mislead me, and I don't like it."

"Indeed I am not, Val. I've retained a lawyer partly because I have need of him in protecting Mrs. Spottswood's interests, and partly because I don't want to have any dealings with such rascals as Stone & Maxey are. I don't like to have anything to do with such people. If I did they'd pretty certainly insult me in some way, and then I'd have to thrash them. I don't care to soil my hands in that way."

Seeing that the girl was less perfectly reassured than he wished, he added:

"Listen, Val. I assure you on my word of honor that after going over every possibility in my mind, I am thoroughly convinced that

those rascals are powerless to do me any harm. They cannot even annoy me seriously. So you must dismiss your fears on my account. They are utterly groundless."

"Now you are candid with me. I thought you weren't till you said that. I feel better now, thank you."

Remembering her strange reticence concerning her attitude toward Greg Tazewell, he was strongly tempted to reply that he wished she would be equally frank with him about every thing that concerned herself closely, but feeling that that would be an unwarrantable intrusion upon her reserve, he refrained.

Presently he excused himself upon the plea that he had important letters to write that night, and went to his room, where he wasted half an hour puzzling over the question: "Why should her concern for me be so great and so emotional?" But he made nothing out of it, and was forced at last to content himself with the reflection that "it is useless for a man to try to fathom the depths of a woman's thinking with the much too short lead line of his thinking. No man ever yet

understood a woman, and no man ever will."

Dismissing the matter he set to work on his letter to his lawyer, which was to accompany the papers from Mattapony. He explained the situation briefly, and referred to the papers themselves for details.

"My wish is," he continued, "that you shall at once take whatever measures your judgment may approve for the protection of a helpless woman who has been shamefully swindled. In any case of my own, of course, I should scorn to plead the usury law or any other technicality for the defeat of a claim. Indeed, even when acting for another and very helpless person I should not resort to technicalities to escape any just obligation. But in this case there has been a persistent and deliberate swindle perpetrated against a defenseless person. I have no hesitation, therefore, in asking you to use every means that the law permits to secure justice. I desire you to employ every technicality you may find effective, and to secure the forfeiture of every dollar of these claims that you find it possible to eliminate from the sum total of the in-

debtedness. I wish to show no mercy to men who have put themselves beyond the pale of consideration. I cannot make too emphatic my desire and purpose that there shall be no abating of insistence upon every right and every privilege that the law secures to the lady whom these men have so greatly wronged. And this applies to matters of the past as well as to those of the present and future. If, in going over the papers you find ground for claiming the repayment to her of any moneys wrongfully taken from her in the past, I desire you to institute the proceedings necessary to the accomplishment of that purpose."

When the lawyer received this communication by the hand of the negro messenger who bore the papers, his partner exclaimed:

"What a fighter he is!"

"Yes, in a good cause," answered the other, who personally knew Phil. "You remember, don't you, the story of the way he interposed in Colonel Shenstone's duel with Vance? I haven't heard of Vance's challenging anybody since that time."

Mindful of the fact that lawyers file all

papers relating to each case separately, Phil had put into another note what he had to say concerning his own affairs. He wrote briefly:

"It is possible that the lawyers, Stone & Maxey may call upon you with reference to matters relating to me. In that event please say that you must consult with me before answering, and then notify me. Till then it is not necessary to trouble you with details, though I shall probably visit you very soon anyhow and tell you of the case."

It was not until he had finished the writing of his letters and had rested himself by the leisurely smoking of a pipe, that Phil, approaching the high dressing case found in every Virginia bedroom of that time, discovered there a missive from Mrs. Albemarle. She had scribbled it hastily during her visit, sealed it and given it to one of the housemaids with instructions to place it where he now found it.

"You're a very ill-mannered young gentleman," it read, "to have run away from Woodlands when you must have felt it in your bones that I was coming. Worse still, in-

stead of returning to meet me at dinner you have waited for me to go away. But then you never were very well-mannered.

"Now that your uncle is nearly well again, we shall expect to see something of you in Richmond. Do you know you haven't called upon a soul since you returned to Virginia? You did come to see me, but not till I sent for you, and I don't believe you'd have come then if Valorie hadn't been with me. I'll expect to meet you at a dozen houses soon. It doesn't do for a particularly eligible young man to confine his visits to one or two young women. It sets people talking.

"Adieu till I see you, which must be soon, as the two charming girls who are staying with me can't remain long."

To this there was a postscript: "Edna Spottswood is a dear girl, but there are others, and, — well, everyday visits are sometimes dangerous, especially to the girl."

Mrs. Albemarle usually had a purpose in writing even her lightest letters. She usually disguised it by putting it into a postscript, as if it had been an afterthought.

XXXVIII

PHIL'S impatience for the long delayed conference with his uncle rendered him so restless that he spent much of his time riding over the plantation, shooting squirrels in the woods and repairing the threshing machine. He was especially apt thus to absent himself from the house on those days when Greg Tazewell was expected to pass a morning there. He tried fishing for silver perch in a distant mill pond, but found himself too impatient to enjoy that sport, though ordinarily he was passionately fond of it.

Colonel Shenstone was still growing steadily stronger, but in his anxiety to avoid a relapse Tazewell still withheld permission for the conference. Day after day passed, and on one of those days Phil received a second letter from Stone & Maxey. Those gentlemen

seemed nettled at his neglect to reply and were disposed to be pressing in their demand for an early answer. They reminded him that this was a matter which he could not safely ignore, and suggested that unless he should respond to this their second communication, they should feel themselves obliged "to adopt other means of attracting his attention."

He wrote in reply saying: "I am quite unable to discover anything in either of your letters to which I am under the slightest obligation to reply. As you seem of a different opinion I must refer you to my attorney, Colonel Minor, the location of whose office you doubtless know."

He enclosed the correspondence to his lawyer, promising to visit him very soon. Then he went to Greg Tazewell, protesting that it was necessary for him to hold the conference with Colonel Shenstone at the earliest possible moment, and Greg consented that it should take place on the next day.

When the next day came Colonel Shenstone

was in a less favorable condition than he had been.

"It isn't a relapse," Greg said. "His gout is not manifesting itself again. It is only that he is aging rapidly. His arteries are hardening. His mind seems clear enough, but he shrinks from using it. In brief he is getting to be an old man and from that there is no recovery."

"Then you think we must postpone this thing?"

"No. On the contrary I think the sooner you have your talk with him the better. He is eager for it, and we have promised him that it shall occur to-day. It would annoy and distress him to postpone it, and besides there is no use. As I say, he is free from gout for the present and free from pain, and he will never be less burdened than now with the incurable malady of old age."

"Very well," said Phil. "But we won't say that sort of thing to Val. It would distress her to no good purpose."

Accordingly it was arranged that as soon

as Colonel Shenstone should be ready and Valorie so far freed from her household cares as to let her listen uninterruptedly, the recital should begin.

Lest a too prolonged sitting up should overfatigue him, the little conference was held in his chamber, where he might be easily transferred from his easy chair to the lounge or to his bed in case of need. When all was ready Colonel Shenstone said:

"Now, Phil, you are to tell everything, even the minutest and most inconsequent details, lest you leave out something of vital importance. You are not a lawyer and you cannot know what is important and what is not."

"I will make the story complete," said Phil, spreading some papers before him.

What he related follows in some chapters of its own without the embarrassment of complex quotation marks.

XXXIX

I FIRST met Norman Page in New Orleans, during my first year on the river. He was much older than I, but the fact that we were both Virginians and exiles drew us together. We were both better educated than even the best of the steamboat men of that time. We both cherished higher standards of morality and conduct than were common on the river in those days. We soon became friends and he took me as his "cub," — that is to say his pupil in piloting. He was recognized as the best pilot in the service then. He knew the Ohio and the Mississippi thoroughly, and he had navigated many of their tributaries. I could not have had a better teacher. When at last I got my license, he and I generally managed to be on the same steamboat.

I told him, little by little, all about myself,

and he, in the same way, told me of his own life, which had been in some ways a troubled one.

He had married Val's mother some years before, and for a year they had been very happy. Then Val was born and the mother died — when the child was a week old.

Val's mother had a half sister, younger than herself, named Eulalie Dexter, and to her care, as her only female relative, Norman Page committed his child. The nurse Nathalie had been devoted to her mistress, Val's mother, and Page stipulated that she should continue to be the baby's nurse. Nathalie was one of those unfortunates, common in New Orleans, whose descent is almost altogether from white ancestry, but who are accounted negroes because of a mere trace of negro blood. Her complexion was that of a clear skinned brunette — just such a complexion as one sees all about him in the most aristocratic Creole drawing rooms. She had the hair, the features and the carriage of a white woman. The admixture of negro blood was "visible" only in the porcelain tinted

whites of her eyes and in the little moons at the roots of her finger nails, and even there the signs of it were so slight that only an expert could have discovered them. For more than a dozen years past she has been regarded as a white woman of the pure-blooded Creole race, and she is now everywhere accepted as such. But she was a slave until Valorie's father purchased her from the estate to which she belonged and set her free in recognition of her devotion to his child.

At the time of his wife's death he established Eulalie Dexter in a comfortable house on the Creole side of the town, provided her with servants and supplied her with the money needed for the maintenance of the ménage.

Eulalie Dexter was a peculiar woman — a woman of very dangerous type though Norman Page, with his chivalric regard for women, did not suspect the fact. In person she was singularly attractive — tall, slender, long-necked and almost serpent-like in the graceful flexibility of her body. She was a woman whom nobody could see in the street without seeking a second look, and she made

the most of her appearance by a really extraordinary art in the fashioning and in the wearing of her clothes.

In intellect she was alert — even brilliant — and in manner she had a certain carefully cultivated simplicity, or ingenuousness,— resembling that of a child — which added mightily to the fascination she exercised over men and women alike.

As for character, she had none, except the veneer of proper conduct which she assumed for reasons of prudence and for the sake of self advancement. Seemingly as innocent of guile as the veriest child, she was in fact utterly unscrupulous in the prosecution of her purposes, whatever they might be.

Norman Page had transferred to his child all the tender devotion he had felt for her mother. He refused to engage in any service that did not have New Orleans for one of its termini, and when in New Orleans he passed all his time observing Val's growth, teaching her to walk when the time came, minutely and lovingly watching the development of her infantile mind. When she was

old enough to understand them he told her stories and recited jingles that delighted her. Both the stories and the jingles were his own. He "made them up" during the long night watches in the pilot house, happy in anticipation of the delight the little girl would manifest when he should come to repeat them to her.

[At this point in his narrative Phil, who was observing Valorie closely, saw tears slipping out between her eyelids. He took no outward notice of the fact, but by way of sparing her, he hurried on to other things.]

Norman Page was never a rich man. He was too generous for that. He stood always ready to open his purse in aid of anybody who was "down on his luck," and especially he was lavish in his generosity toward steamboat men in distress, however humble their rank among steamboat men might be, and however obviously their misfortunes might be due to their own fault. From captains to roustabouts he was always ready to come to their rescue when misfortune befell. But he made money easily, and having no bad habits,

he had accumulated a modest competence, when Eulalie Dexter decided to make herself his wife. She exercised a certain fascination over him, as she did over all who came into contact with her, but he had loved Val's mother far too devotedly ever to love any other woman. He resisted this woman's wiles so successfully that she found it necessary to resort to other methods. She ceased to smile. She put aside all her gayety. She assumed the demeanor of one in distress and perplexity. The change in her was so marked that Page, with his always ready sympathy, sought to find out its cause in the hope of alleviating her sorrow, whatever its nature might be. At first she pretended to resist his entreaties to know what was the matter, but one day, when his inquiries were especially sympathetic, she burst into tears — for she seems to have been a consummate actor — and said to him:

"It isn't your fault, Norman — or at any rate you have not intended what you have done. But your being here at my house so much — spending all the daylight hours here

whenever you are in New Orleans, and usually staying till Valorie's bed time — all this has made people talk until now everybody shuns me."

So she went on, weeping and elaborating her account of her sufferings, until Page's chivalry could not fail to come to the rescue. She knew how to make herself agreeable as well as fascinating, and having failed to fascinate him, she had taken pains to make herself agreeable to him. Why should he not atone for the grievous wrong he had unconsciously done her, by making her his wife?

With scarcely a moment's thought he proposed that course to her, and she accepted it.

For a time the two got on very well together. Eulalie took care that it should be so, until, little by little, she had induced him to transfer most of his property to her. "It is only that Valorie and I may be provided for in case anything should happen," she explained, "and you know steamboating is a hazardous business."

When Valorie was about six or seven years old,— that was before I knew Norman Page

— he accepted an offer to go as chief pilot on a slow, freight steamer, carrying a cargo of cotton and molasses to Pittsburg. There were very few pilots who knew both the Mississippi and the Ohio throughout its entire length, and by way of avoiding the necessity of changing their chief pilot several times on the voyage, the owners of the boat offered Page unusually high wages to take their boat up and back. The voyage, including the time consumed in discharging cargo at Pittsburg and taking on a new one there and at Cincinnati, Louisville and other points, promised to occupy a couple of months, for the boat was very slow and dangerously overloaded. Valorie wept bitterly when she learned that he was likely to be away for so long, but he bade her be of good cheer, gently released his head from her encircling arms, and hurried away.

He never saw her afterwards.

On his return to New Orleans he hurried to his home and found it occupied by strangers who soon convinced him that they had bought it for less than half its value from his wife.

He was bewildered. Letters from Eulalie

had reached him at various points — the latest one of them at Vicksburg, less than two days before. In none of these had she given the least intimation of her intention to sell the house, yet upon inquiry he learned that she had actually sold it within the first week of his absence, and further inquiry revealed the fact that about the same time she had sold all her other property at a like sacrifice.

He could in nowise understand, and he was especially puzzled to explain the receipt of the series of letters from her, most of them dated and postmarked after the time of her apparent flight. I may as well explain that he afterwards discovered the secret of that. She had carefully prepared the series of letters before her disappearance, dating them at intervals in the future; she had left them with a person who was employed to post each of them on the date it bore, and she had eloped with an opera tenor who left his wife penniless in New Orleans.

But before inquiring into such details, Page had devoted himself with almost insane eagerness to the discovery of Val's whereabouts.

To that end he first sought for Nathalie in every place where he thought her likely to be, but with no result. He could not believe that she, too, had betrayed him, but he had little to guide him in his search for her, until the thought entered his mind that the faithful nurse might be hunting for him while he was searching for her. Very naturally she would go to the steamboat from which he had landed, as soon as she should learn of its return. Convinced of this he hurried back to the levee, and there, as he had hoped, he found Nathalie seated upon a corn sack within full view of the gang plank of his boat. She had hurried to the boat, and had arrived just after he had gone ashore. Sure that he would return to look for her there, she had remained, impatiently awaiting him.

But now that he had found her she could give him little information, and none at all of the kind he desired.

She told him that a few days after he had started up the river, Mrs. Page had sent her, Nathalie, to deliver a note addressed to some one out near the steamboat landing on Lake

Pontchartrain. She had bidden her take a fly and not to return until she should find the person intended and deliver the note, the address upon which was vague. Nathalie had spent the whole afternoon in a vain search, and at last she had returned to town. Upon reaching the house she found it closed and locked, and from that hour she had been utterly unable to find trace of Valorie. She succeeded in learning that the woman had gone away with the tenor, so she visited the man's abandoned wife, but that unhappy woman could give her no information except that her husband and Mrs. Page had taken ship for Havana, and had taken no child with them.

When Nathalie had finished her story she said to her master: "If you blame me for this, I'll jump into the river," and her tone showed clearly that she meant it. Page reassured her, telling her that not the smallest blame was hers, and that she must not jump into the river for the reason that he needed her help in finding the child. The two set about the search and prosecuted it ceaselessly, but without result, except that a dressmaker who had

made many gowns for Eulalie told him his wife had said to her that she was going to send the child to France or Italy to be educated and trained for the stage. The woman added that Mrs. Page had said she was to give this information if any one should inquire about the child.

[At this point Colonel Shenstone's weakness and weariness under the strain of prolonged attention, was so apparent that Greg Tazewell insisted upon a suspension of the narrative until the next day. The rest of the story, as related afterwards, follows in the succeeding chapters.]

XL

THE property which Page had given to his wife, and which she had now sold, constituted the greater part of his possessions, but fortunately he had some money in bank and he owned an interest in some steamboats. Converting everything into cash, he set out at once for Europe, taking Nathalie with him to help him in his search there for his child. The loss of his faithless wife would have given him little concern, if the child had been left to him, for Eulalie had never won his affection in any marked way, and even his respect for her had been seriously impaired by the more intimate acquaintance with her character which married life had given him. Still I reckon it was just as well that he did not discover the tenor, Signor Minghetti, whose real name was John Lee. The fellow had put such an affront

upon him as it was not in Norman Page's nature to endure if he could have met the man.

Page spent a year or two in his search in France and Italy, and by the time his money was exhausted, he was satisfied that he had been following a wrong scent. There was nothing for him to do but return to America and set to work to repair his fortunes. With his first earnings he established Nathalie in a little business of her own in Canal Street, bidding her regard herself thereafter as a white person, a thing likely to be advantageous to her in business, as well as otherwise. "Her taint," he said to me when telling me the story long afterwards, "was so immeasurably small that it was a cruel wrong to recognize it as any taint at all."

He had given up all hope of ever finding his child, but Nathalie's optimism was more obstinate. Perhaps optimism was all that her trace of negro blood had given to her character. At any rate she continued to hope that some day she should find the child to whom she had given a love closely like that of a

mother. A year ago this month her hope was fulfilled. By the merest accident she learned that the girl for whom she had sought through the long years was in a convent school at some little distance from New Orleans. Fearing that time and possibly an association with her runaway stepmother might so far have changed Val as to render it wiser not to tell Page of her discovery, she decided, with her Creole shrewdness, to make inquiries. Arraying herself in a costume befitting a well-to-do gentlewoman, she visited the convent under a pretense of inquiring the terms for some young lady in whom she assumed to be interested.

She was told that the rules of the establishment forbade the sisters to receive any pupils over fifteen years of age, or to keep any pupil after she should pass her fifteenth birthday. She was disheartened at this, for she knew that Valorie was more than seventeen, and she argued that her information as to Valorie's presence in the institution, must be erroneous. At that moment she saw two girls walking among the trees of the closely walled grounds.

In spite of the years she recognized one of them as Valorie. Turning to the sister she said:

"Surely that tall girl is more than fifteen."

"No," answered the nun. "We do not know her age exactly, but we are assured by those who are her sponsors that she is only fourteen. Ours is a refuge even more than it is a school, you know, and there are some cases —"

"In which girls are fourteen for a long time," answered Nathalie, with a carefully placative smile. "I see. Of course in such cases you are bound to believe what you are told, and doubtless it is better so."

I must tell you that Nathalie is educated, as many of her class are in Louisiana, that her manners are altogether those of a lady, and that she has a certain suave self possession that would have made a capital actress of her had she been trained for the stage.

She could not ask to see Val without exciting suspicion, and she knew, too, that it was a violation of the very necessary rules of the convent for any of the girls to receive

visitors. But upon pretense of interest in the beauty of the sub-tropical gardens, she stood for a minute by an open window, remaining there till she caught sight of Val again. Then she commented to the nun upon the beauty of "the child," and the peculiar grace of her carriage. The nun replied with an appearance of pleasure in the commendation, saying:

"She is carefully trained to that, and also in her music. We employ special masters for her — she is to go on the stage. She is a very pleasing girl, and her mother, who has just returned from abroad, thinks she will be a greatly successful actress. You should see her dance. She is extraordinary."

Nathalie took her leave graciously and returning to the city, wrote and sent a dozen letters to Norman Page, addressing them to the different cities on the river, and adding to his name, on each of the envelopes, the legend, "pilot or captain of a steamboat," so that each letter would be sent to the headquarters of the pilot's association in the city to which it was addressed. Nathalie feared

that Eulalie, from whom Page had long before secured a divorce, might remove Val from the school and take her away somewhere before her father's arrival. Now that the woman had returned, something of that kind was more than likely and she gave special emphasis to the danger in all her letters.

Page was running on the steamboat Highflyer at the time, plying between Louisville and St. Louis. It was at St. Louis that he received one of Nathalie's letters. I happened to be there at the time looking after one of my new steamboat lines. For the moment his mind refused to grasp the truth. In a dazed way he handed the missive to me and I read it.

"This means," I said, "that you must go to New Orleans at once, and of course I shall go with you. Fortunately the Bald Eagle is just ready to leave, and she's one of the fastest boats on the river. Don't let her get away without us. Shake yourself together, go on board of her and ask Captain Murdock to hold her till I come. I'll go to the Highflyer and ask Captain Wright to get another pilot in

your place. Hurry, or the Eagle will get away before you get there."

I remember almost the exact words I used, because I was really frightened by his dazed condition, and wanted to rouse him by giving him something to do. He pulled himself together and hurried away. Half an hour later I went aboard the Bald Eagle and she was immediately cast loose. Now you're tired again, Uncle Butler, and must wait and rest before hearing more. There is still a great deal to be told.

XLI

[It was after dinner when Phil went on with his narrative.]

ON the way down the river, Norman told me in detail of his fears and his plans. Chiefly his fear was that his ex-wife, Eulalie Lee, might take Valorie and leave the country or go into hiding with her before he could get to New Orleans. As for his plans, he intended to place Val in the keeping of some proper person in Virginia, so that she might come to womanhood under those influences which he regarded as best for girls in the formative period of young womanhood. He had himself no near relatives here, and he had been so long absent from the State that he knew no one whom he could ask to receive his daughter, so he appealed to me, and I, confident of your approval, promised him that she should find a home at Woodlands.

A little way below Memphis the Bald Eagle's boilers — seven in all and all connected contrary to law — exploded, tearing the boat literally to pieces and scattering the fragments of her upper works over the river for half a mile in every direction. Page and I were sitting on the forward guards at the time, and both of us were hurled high in air. When I struck the water I sank to so great a depth that although I had my wits about me I had great difficulty in holding my breath long enough to reach the surface. My left arm and my left leg were slightly scalded by the escaping steam, but otherwise I was uninjured. A moment after I got my first full breath, I saw Page come to the surface, and seeing that he was unconscious and about to sink again, I seized him and with some difficulty swam ashore with his half lifeless body. He had inhaled water and was well nigh drowned. On reaching the shore, the people who had hurried from the houses near by, soon relieved his lungs and we had him breathing again. But he was fearfully scalded.

I had him removed to the nearest house and

summoned physicians from Memphis, the two volunteer doctors who were present, having far more than they could do in caring for the large number of wounded. Under some palliative treatment his suffering was so far relieved by nightfall that his mind cleared and he could talk with me. But from the first there was no hope of his recovery. When the doctors, while dressing my own trifling burns, assured me of that, I, knowing how brave a man he was, and knowing, too, that he would have some instructions to give me, frankly told him what the verdict of the physicians was.

He looked at me out of his brave, gentle eyes, and said, "Thank you, Phil, for telling me. I'm sorry I shall not be able to see my little girl again. But you must look after her, Phil. You must get her out of the convent. It won't be easy to do that, but Nathalie will help. Get her out and take her to Virginia. Promise me, Phil."

I told him I would do as he wished at all costs and all hazards and it seemed to relieve his mind. He could not talk connectedly.

His words came in gasps, as if painfully forced out. The doctors explained that by telling me that some of the air passages were scalded. Presently he said:

"All my money is in your hands, Phil, invested in your steamboat enterprises and paying well. Keep it so for Valorie, till she comes of age. If I could write —"

He grew silent for a long time. Then he said: *"We are two gentlemen of Virginia—we need no writing."*

Those were the last words he spoke and the phrase he used, "two gentlemen of Virginia," has been a talisman with me ever since, a sufficient pledge of honor for me to give or to receive in any dealing with a man of Norman Page's kind.

[At this point the lawyer instinct in Colonel Shenstone asserted itself. "Of course, you took out letters of administration?"

"No," answered Phil. "It didn't occur to me as necessary. All the property was already in my hands, by his own act, and I have so managed it as to double it and more during the last year."

"Very irregular!" exclaimed the old lawyer; "very irregular indeed! But go on with your story, Phil." The young man proceeded.]

I buried my friend in a Memphis cemetery and ordered a temporary stone placed over his grave to mark it. I have since erected a fitter monument to him. I had no time to lose then, but must take the first boat for New Orleans.

There I went at once to see Nathalie. I found her a woman of unusual shrewdness, with a presence and a manner altogether modest but attractive. She had been at pains to learn that Val was still in the convent, but it was not easy to devise means by which to get her out. The ladies of the convent had received their charge at Mrs. Eulalie Lee's hands, as her daughter, Valorie Lee. They could not be expected to surrender her to anybody without Mrs. Lee's authority. It was obviously useless to hope for that. The rules of the convent, like those of all girls' schools, very properly forbade pupils to receive letters except through the hands of those in author-

ity. It was, therefore, impossible to communicate with Val in the ordinary way. Nathalie was confident, and so was I, that if she could get a note to Val, telling her what to do, she would obey the instruction. But how to accomplish that was a problem.

We thought of employing some negro woman to approach the servants in the school, but that would be dangerous in many ways. At last Nathalie hit upon a plan. She had learned that most, if not all the girls in the convent, were the daughters of actresses or other women who for one reason or another could not keep their daughters with them. She had among her customers one woman of the stage, who, as leading lady in a New Orleans stock company, did in fact live permanently in the city, with her daughter, a bright, intelligent child of twelve. But her profession would sufficiently account for a wish on her part to place the girl in the school. Nathalie believed she could induce this lady to assist us. Her plan was to have the lady visit the school, inquire terms and conditions of admission, and then ask the privilege of

placing her daughter there for a few days or a week, to see if the child could be happy and contented in the institution, before deciding to place her there permanently. Nathalie's plan was, if she could gain the mother's consent, to take the girl into the secret and entrust a letter to her for secret delivery to Val.

The mother was a good-natured, obliging sort of person, fond of Nathalie and always in her debt for "creations" in the way of costly gowns and the like. Moreover she was theatrical to her finger-tips, and the idea of playing a leading part in a little drama in real life seemed to appeal strongly to her. As soon as the situation was explained to her she entered heartily into the scheme.

I had some very pressing affairs to attend to up the river, so as soon as matters were in train, I left Nathalie to execute her plan, instructing her to telegraph me as soon as she should get possession of Val, and then to get out of Louisiana with her as soon as possible. In aid of that I ordered one of my steamboat captains to lie at the levee, with steam partially up until Nathalie should come on board with

her charge. He was then to leave at once, landing the two at Memphis, whence Nathalie was to come immediately to Richmond by the Memphis & Charleston railroad and its connections, and meet me at the Exchange Hotel.

Nathalie managed the matter skilfully. She prepared a long letter to Val, telling her of her stepmother's plans to sell her to the stage — a thing that Val already knew and intensely dreaded. She explained that she, Nathalie, acting with Val's best friends, meant to rescue her and take her to live in Virginia. Nathalie remembered how Val had learned from her father to think of Virginia as a promised land. She instructed Val to slip out of the convent grounds in any way she could and on any day she could; that a carriage, with Nathalie in it, would await her at a point designated, a short distance from the convent gates.

Nathalie patiently waited there in the carriage from ten till five every day for many days. Then at last Val managed to slip out and join her. You know the rest of that story.

Now Eulalie Lee, instigated I suppose by her tenor companion, though I know nothing about that, is trying either to recover Val and exploit her, or to extort money from us. She must know that she can't get Val, but she and her rascally lawyers think they may succeed in extorting money. They tried the game with you first, Uncle Butler, and you seem to have frightened them off. Now they are trying to scare money out of me. They have written to me twice, and if you wish I'll read their letters.

[After reading the communications, Phil finished in few words.]

"I'm going to town to-morrow to explain the case to my lawyers. I think they'll know how to put an end to the annoyance."

XLII

WHEN Phil had finished his story, Colonel Shenstone said to him:

"I have been greatly interested, Phil, and I have a general conviction that those fellows can't seriously annoy you. But since this last illness I find it difficult to grasp and remember all the details of such a case. I think you said you had engaged a lawyer."

"Yes, I felt that in your weakened condition, Uncle, you ought not to be bothered, so I have retained an attorney in Richmond. I hope you do not think —"

"Oh, not at all. I'm glad of that. But you'd better see your counsel to-morrow. I think I'll go to bed now. I've been up most of the day, and I'm tired."

Valorie summoned his servant and herself made preliminary arrangements for her uncle's comfort. As she did so she observed certain

manifestations of weakness or something else on his part, which she had never seen before. Especially she observed the uncertainty of his motions. He would miss objects which he attempted to touch with his hands, and his hands trembled more than she had ever known them to do before. When he walked he seemed about to fall and had to hurry, almost to run, in order to keep his feet under his person.

"Sit down here, Uncle Butler," the girl said, gently forcing him into an easy chair. "You are not to try to unbutton your collar or do anything else for yourself. Henry will undress you. You're very tired. There! Now Henry has your slippers off, and he'll do all the rest. I'll send Mr. Phil in here to superintend and to help lift you into bed. He's so strong, you know, and *so* gentle."

The old man laid his hand upon hers, as if to detain her.

"You are a dear Little Minx," he said. "You won't go away, will you, Little Minx?"

"No, Uncle Butler. I'll always be within call when you want me."

"You won't go away with — who is it? That woman, I mean?"

"Never, Uncle, never, never, never."

"Thank you. Good night Little Minx. You're so good to me!"

Valorie was too much alarmed for tears. She asked Phil to go to his uncle's assistance, and then sought Greg Tazewell. Telling him what she had observed, she begged him to tell her what it meant.

"Feebleness, mainly," he replied evasively.

"What else?" she demanded. "You are keeping something back."

"That is hardly a just charge," he answered. "If I reserved anything it was only a fear, and not anything that I know."

"Tell me, please."

"It isn't easy to say just what I think, because there are uncertainties to be allowed for. But Colonel Shenstone has aged very rapidly since last summer. He is in effect a much older man than the number of his years would indicate. He is only seventy or seventy-one, I believe, and a year ago he seemed

much younger even than that. But his present physical condition is that of a much older man. I had already observed the tendency you speak of, the involuntary impulse to run when he attempts to walk. That, taken in connection with the tremor of his hands, indicates a condition which we call festination, or hurrying."

"Is there nothing to be done for it?"

"No. It is a symptom of trouble with the blood circulation in the brain. The difficulty he spoke of in the matter of grasping details and remembering them is another indication of the same sort. There is no remedy either for these things or for the condition of which they are merely symptoms. There is nothing to be done but watch him, keep him comfortable and have his servant always by his side when he is on his feet. He might fall, you know. I've already told Henry what he is to do in that respect. As Phil really must go to town in the morning I think I'll ride over early and remain here during the day."

Valorie choked back the lump that had formed in her throat, and asked:

"Dr. Tazewell, is Uncle Butler going to die? Is that what you mean?"

"No, Miss Valorie. I do not think he is going to die at present,— probably not for a long time to come. Indeed I expect presently to see him much better than he is now. But just now it is desirable to watch him closely, to protect him against all excitement, and to keep his surroundings as peaceful as possible. In the immediate present, too, there are possibilities to be considered and to be prepared for. One of these is the possibility of a brain hemorrhage. Should that happen — as I sincerely hope it may not — it would be necessary to have a strong man present, other than the servants and more intelligent. Perhaps I am unduly cautious. But I think I had better be here whenever Phil is not."

Valorie was deeply moved, and without another word she passed up the stairs, and Greg rode away.

It was after supper that Valorie met Phil Shenstone alone for the first time after the completion of his narrative. With less of reserve than she had shown toward him at any

time since his return to Virginia, and indeed with a good deal of the old frank cordiality, she said to him:

"Mr. Phil, you can't think how I thank you!"

"For what, Val?"

"For loving my father and honoring and defending his memory. You'd know what I mean if you knew what that woman — that vampire — told me about him. Mr. Phil?"

"Yes, Valorie."

"Won't you tell me about the tombstone? I want to know what it is like, so that I may picture it in my mind. Some day I'm going out there to see it for myself, and to place some flowers on it. But describe it to me now, won't you?"

"Fortunately I can do better than that, Val. I have the architect's drawing of it in one of my trunks. If you'll wait a little while I'll bring it to you."

The girl clapped her hands in glee, as any ten-year-old child might have done, for joy and sorrow, grief and gladness lay always

close together in her strangely sincere and sympathetic soul.

"The child and the woman are curiously blended in her nature," Phil reflected as he mounted the stairs. "God grant that nothing may ever happen to make it otherwise."

For the next hour the two sat together, Valorie studying the beautifully simple proportions of the shaft, and questioning him minutely concerning it. The inscription carved upon the granite was written below the drawing, and Valorie knew it by heart when she handed the sheet back to him.

"You may keep it if you like," he said.

"Thank you, Mr. Phil."

XLIII

THE next day Phil fully laid the facts of his case before Colonel Minor, his counsel. After asking all the questions that seemed to him necessary concerning the abduction, Colonel Minor sat musing for awhile. Phil, impatient to know his opinion, asked:

"Have Stone & Maxey been to see you about this?"

"No, and I don't think they will come. On such a state of facts they must know they haven't any case against you. They have tried to scare a settlement out of you and they have failed. They were trading upon the fact that you were a layman in the law, and they will hardly try anything of that kind on me or my partner Guigon. Still there's one possibility that we mustn't overlook."

"What is that?"

"Why, that they don't really know the facts. That woman may have colored them or she may have misstated them, or withheld vital details. Designing women often do that, you know, even with their own lawyers."

"But that is a foolish thing to do!"

"Of course it is, but it is often done. You see, the lawyers in this case persist in speaking of Miss Page as this woman's daughter. It is not unlikely that their client has told them so and sticks to it. If it were true it would make all the difference imaginable."

"How so? It wouldn't enable them to prove that I kidnapped the young woman."

"No, but it might enable them to give a good deal of trouble on Miss Page's account. You see, if she were really Mrs. Lee's daughter, Mrs. Lee would be entitled to her guardianship, and in order to deprive her of that right we should have to prove affirmatively that she is a woman of bad character, unfit to have custody of her own child. However, you say you can prove that she is not the mother?"

"Yes, easily. Miss Page has the certifi-

cates of both her father's marriages and of her own birth. I procured the latter in official form from New Orleans. I thought it might be needed."

"That was very wise. Unless the woman has been deceiving Stone & Maxey — and they are not persons whom I should think it easy to deceive — they will take no further steps looking to your prosecution. Indeed, I think we may dismiss that as a thing settled. But if she has deceived them and still claims to be Miss Page's mother, they may give us some trouble on the young lady's account. Has anybody ever been appointed her guardian?"

"Not within my knowledge."

"How much does her interest in your steamboat enterprises amount to?"

"About thirty thousand dollars now — it has doubled within a year."

"Is it in the form of stock certificates?"

"No, we aren't a corporation."

"That's rather a pity. Still we may be able to do something. Do you know anybody who would buy her interest for cash?"

"I'd do it myself," Phil answered, "but for the fact that it is earning more as it is than the cash would earn, and I am planning things that will double it again within a year. It would be a pity to have her lose that prospect. However, I can arrange that. I might buy her interest and then, when she comes of age, sell it back to her, as of this date, with its share of the increase added. But why do you think this necessary?"

"Why simply because Miss Page has only a residence in Virginia. If she had property within this state, I would advise that she select a guardian — yourself or someone else. She would then be under the care of the chancery court, and that court would not permit anybody to remove her from the state or to assume custody of her person except by its own decree upon a satisfactory showing of necessity."

"Then if she had property in this state, you could create a situation which would completely free her from the possibility of annoyance?"

"Yes — easily and certainly."

"Very well. She shall have thirty thousand dollars in Virginia Sixes in the Farmers' Bank of Virginia before nightfall. And when she comes of age she shall have a sum sufficient to make good the loss involved to her and the gain to me by reason of the withdrawal of her steamboat investments.

"The bonds will be in the bank to her credit at the opening of business to-morrow morning. Please institute the necessary proceedings in the guardianship matter at once. Is there any thing for her or for me to do?"

"Not much. She will be summoned to the circuit court in your county — it is sitting now — and asked to choose a guardian for herself. The person chosen should be present, prepared to execute the required bond, though that is not necessary. That is all."

Phil Shenstone was accustomed to Western ways of business. It was his habit, when his mind was made up as to what he wanted to do, to do it out of hand. When he left the lawyer's office he went at once to his bank, inquired the amount of his balance, drew upon his bankers at the West for the additional

sum needed, and had the amount placed to his credit. Then he opened negotiations for the Virginia Sixes, purchased them and placed them in the vaults of the Farmers' Bank of Virginia in a box marked with Valorie's name, and subject to her order.

This done he mounted and rode to Woodlands, where he arrived just in time for the four o'clock dinner.

Greg Tazewell rode away almost immediately after dinner, and as soon as he had gone, Phil secured audience with Valorie.

"Val," he said, "I've bought out all your steamboat interests, and invested the money for you in Virginia six per cent. bonds. The bonds are in the Farmers' Bank of Virginia for safekeeping. They have a face value of thirty thousand dollars, but they could be sold for more than that, as they are at a premium."

"What a lot of money, Mr. Phil," exclaimed the girl. "I hope it didn't embarrass you to — well, to do whatever you had to do in arranging it."

"Not at all. You see, a man who owns many steamboats must always keep a pretty

large sum of money in bank where he can put his hand on it at a moment's notice."

"Why is that, Mr. Phil?"

"Oh, for several reasons. He may suddenly have to buy a steamboat, or one of his boats may burn or sink or any one of a dozen other things may happen which make it necessary for him to have a good deal of ready money. So I always keep good balances in Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis and New Orleans. When I found it necessary to-day to buy out your interests I had only to make a draught upon one of my bank accounts, for the necessary money."

"Oh, I see," she said, "I'm glad it didn't bother you."

"I hope you sanction the transaction?" he said.

"Why, of course. You know all about such things, and whatever you do is right."

"You are a strange girl, Val."

"In what way, Mr. Phil?"

"Any other woman would have wanted to know all about this thing, and why I did it, and a score of other things, while you ask no

more questions about it than you would if I had told you I had bought you a box of candy."

"Why should I?" she asked. "My father placed his money in your hands and told you to manage it for me, didn't he?"

"Yes, but —"

"Well, then why should I question you about how you manage it? That would be a reflection upon both my father and you."

"But what if I want to tell you about it?"

"Oh, you are to tell me whatever you like, of course. That's quite different."

"Very well. I did this under the advice of my lawyer, Colonel Minor, by way of putting an end to the pestilent activity of the woman you called a vampire, and her disreputable lawyers."

"You don't mean you have paid them any money, or are to pay them any?" The question was asked in an indignant tone.

"Not a cent," he replied. "I'd go to jail rather than do that. But Colonel Minor advises me that if you own property of any kind in Virginia and are living here, the court will

appoint a guardian for you, who will have control of your affairs until you come of age. So I have converted your steamboat property into State bonds. Presently you will be asked to go to the court and choose a guardian."

"That will be you, of course, Mr. Phil."

"I think not. You see, Val, I'm getting Mrs. Spottswood's affairs into good shape now, and as soon as you have a guardian appointed my work in Virginia will be done. I am going West then, to carry out some large plans I have formed."

Valorie's face clouded, not with anger, but with disappointment. He was not looking at her at the moment, and so he did not see the expression, but went on to say:

"And anyhow, it will be better to have Greg in the place."

"Am I free to choose?" she asked coldly, and making no other response to his suggestion.

"Yes, entirely so."

"Then as you decline to serve, I'm going to write to Judge Albemarle and ask him to be

my guardian. I don't want to be under obligations of any kind to Dr. Tazewell."

Without waiting for his reply she glided into the house, going at once to Colonel Shenstone's chamber.

Phil was doubly puzzled. The tone in which she had spoken of his having "declined" to serve, was an injured one, and he could in no wise guess why it should be so. Still more puzzling was her prompt refusal to have Greg Tazewell for her guardian, and her curious explanation that she did not wish to be under obligation to him. Phil gave up the riddle presently, and dismissed the matter from his mind as "only one more inscrutable manifestation of the feminine character."

When he met her at supper she seemed preoccupied and not quite happy he thought. But she entered freely into such conversation as arose between the two. Valorie might be angry, or hurt in her sensibilities, but she was never sulky.

XLIV

JUDGE ALBEMARLE was at breakfast when he received Valorie's letter asking him to act as her guardian. He read the missive twice, with curiosity. Then he passed it to Mrs. Albemarle, saying: "See if you can make out what it means, Mattie."

She read the lines as follows:

"I wonder if your being a judge will prevent you from doing me a favor? Or is it contempt of court for me to ask such a thing? It seems I must have a guardian. I'm sure I often think I need one, but that is only when I do very foolish things, and I can't think of anything very foolish that I've been doing lately. Still, Mr. Phil's lawyers have decided that I must have a guardian and I suppose I must. I want you to be that for me if you will. You aren't my first choice, of course. My father left all his money in Mr. Phil's

hands and he has taken care of it for me till now. I asked him to be my guardian and go on taking care of it, but he can't, because he is going away to the West again and doesn't mean to come back ever. So I've decided to ask you to do it for me. Will you?"

Mrs. Albemarle made no effort to explain the matter. Instead she said:

"Jack, I must see Phil Shenstone immediately. I'll send him a note after breakfast. You'll write to Valorie and tell her you'll serve, won't you?"

"Of course. Ordinary gallantry requires that; but I can't imagine what it all means."

"It means that somebody has been more than ordinarily stupid. I'll tell you all about it after I have seen Phil."

When she had finished her breakfast she kept her promise of writing to Phil. Her letter was a thoroughly diplomatic one, effectually concealing the purpose with which it was written. It contained no reference to Valorie or Valorie's affairs, and it made no mention of her letter to Judge Albemarle.

"I want to see you, Phil, at the earliest time you can make it convenient to come to me. Indeed I *must* see you, about some perplexing things I have on my mind. I want to consult with you. You see, Jack is of no account in such things. His head is too full of 'precedents' and 'rulings' and 'statutes, in that case made and provided.' So come to me, please, as soon as you can. You needn't mind about the 'customary hours of calling' or anything of that kind."

In the postscript she said:

"I suppose you're madly in love with Edna Spottswood by this time. I'm rather sorry for that, for a young man in love with a girl who lives out of town is of no account socially, and I'm planning a lot of things for this spring."

In the restlessness that afflicted him at that time, Phil welcomed the prospect of the diversion which a response to this invitation promised, and he would have set off for Richmond at once if that had been permitted. But Colonel Minor had hastened matters. The court

was in session for the county in which Woodlands lay, and when it should adjourn it would not meet again for several months. Accordingly Colonel Minor sent a note to Phil asking him to have Valorie at the Court House, a few miles from Woodlands, on the afternoon of the day on which Mrs. Albemarle's letter was received.

Phil escorted her to the county seat of course, where the business was quickly adjusted, but it was nearly nightfall when the returning carriage reached Woodlands. Phil must therefore delay his visit until the morrow.

Colonel Shenstone was particularly bright and cheerful that evening. He was rejoicing that Valorie was now safe from further annoyance, and in his satisfaction he insisted that his "Little Minx" should sit by his easy chair in the chamber and talk to him gently. He dismissed Phil as a superfluous person on that occasion, saying: "Amuse yourself, my boy, in any way you please. I just want my Little Minx with me and nobody else."

The old man and the young woman talked long and lovingly together with nothing to in-

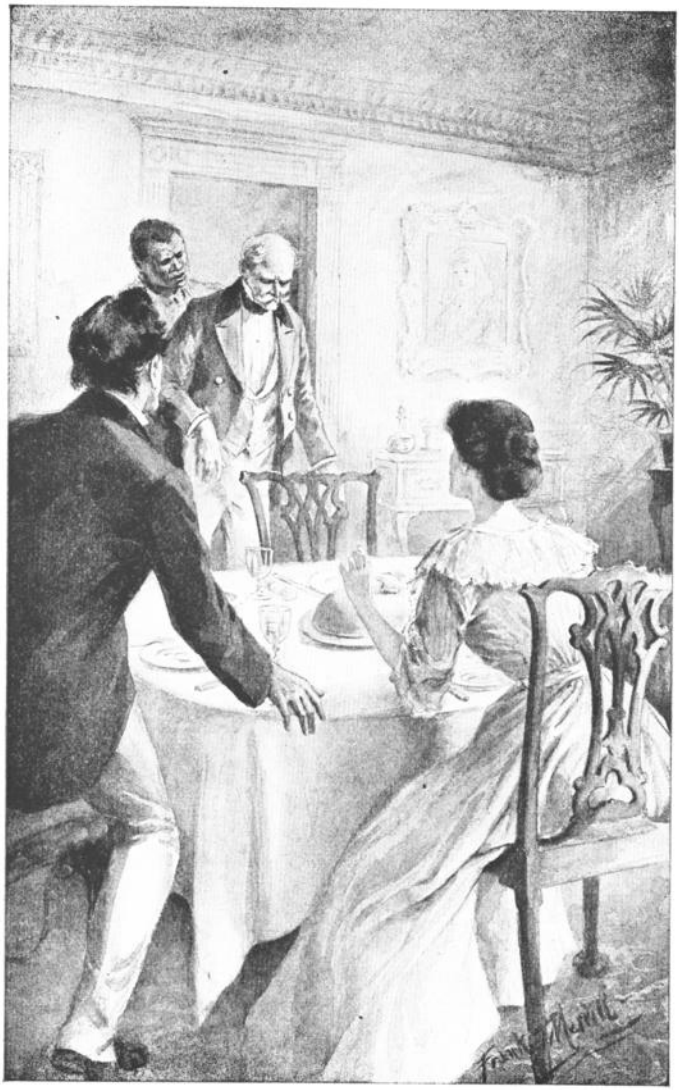
terfere, for Valorie was too perfectly mistress of herself to let him see the shadow that had rested upon her spirit ever since Phil had so unemotionally told her of his purpose to go away.

Phil meanwhile sat in his room, with plans, estimates and other papers spread upon the table before him. For now that Valorie was safe and Mrs. Spottswood's affairs in the hands of capable lawyers, he meant to quit the scene of his disappointment almost immediately. He wanted to perfect his plans so that he might be ready for action the moment he should reach the West.

" Besides," he reflected, " I'm not very good company for myself just now. I need distraction, and work over my plans will keep me from thinking too much."

When he rose next morning the young man dressed himself in riding costume, meaning to set out for Richmond immediately after breakfast, and return in time for supper.

As he and Valorie sat at breakfast, Colonel Shenstone, walking very unsteadily and supported by his servant, entered the room. It



"Oh, Uncle Butler, what is the matter?"—*Page 421.*

was his custom, now that he seemed to be growing stronger again, to take his meals at table with the others, and so his coming did not surprise Phil or Valorie. But as Valorie looked up to greet him she exclaimed with alarm and distress in her voice:

"Oh, Uncle Butler, what is the matter! What has happened?"

Shuffling into his chair, he tried to answer. "Nothing," but the word was uttered thickly and with difficulty, while his face was strangely distorted. One eye drooped until it was well nigh closed, and one side of his mouth sagged as if its muscles had been paralyzed. One arm hung limp and useless, and one leg was under scarcely better control. When seated he manifested a tendency to fall over sideways, so that it was necessary for his servant to support him.

Phil guessed at once what was the matter, and he gave his orders promptly. To the dining-room servant he said:

"Send Dick for Dr. Tazewell at once. Tell him to ride my horse and to push him every inch of the way."

Then to Colonel Shenstone's body servant he said:

"Help me get him back to bed;" and to Valorie, who was ordering hot water, mustard and everything else she could think of, he said:

"Never mind things of that sort, Val. There is nothing whatever to be done till Greg comes, except put him to bed, and there is no immediate danger, dear!"

Even in her distress she observed the unaccustomed term of endearment. As matters stood between her and Phil she would have been more or less than a woman if she had not.

"But can't we soothe his pain?" she asked.

"He has no pain, I think."

The old man confirmed this assurance, saying with difficulty —"No pain, Little Minx,— no pain."

"Thank God for that much!" she exclaimed, and she waited anxiously for Phil to come out of the chamber again. When he did so she asked with strained face and faltering voice:

"What is it, Mr. Phil? Tell me, tell me, tell me."

"A stroke of some kind," he answered, "a cerebral hemorrhage, I think. It is what is called apoplexy, if I am not mistaken. Greg will know, and he will be here within the hour. When he sees that Dick is riding my horse, he'll know the call is a hurried one and he'll ride hard, you may be sure."

In his thought he added:

"I wish I could believe his coming would do any good," but he did not utter the words.

"Are you sure he has no pain?" she asked anxiously. "His features are horribly distorted."

"Yes, I'm sure of that, Val. Apoplexy tends to paralyze the sense of pain. I doubt that he would feel it if a pin were thrust into his flesh on the side affected. The distortion of his features is due simply to the absence of nervous control over the muscles, I think."

Then, with a loving purpose to distract the poor girl's mind and occupy her attention until Greg should come, he said:

"I wish you'd go at once, Val, and write

to Mrs. Albemarle about this. He was her guardian in her girlhood, you know, and she dearly loves him. She loves you, too, and will want to come to us in our affliction. Write to her, and I'll send a special messenger to carry your note by the ten-thirty train."

He intended to send also by the messenger, a telegraphic despatch to be forwarded from the railroad station, but he wanted Valorie to write the letter for the sake of the relief it would give her to do so.

Soon after she completed the task, Greg Tazewell came. When he came out of the chamber after examining his patient, he confirmed Phil's conjecture as to the nature of the attack.

In answer to Valorie's anxious questions he said:

"He will probably recover from the attack. There is a blood clot, producing pressure on the brain. It will, in all likelihood, be slowly absorbed. Meanwhile he will suffer no pain. There is nothing to be done to hasten the process of absorption. He needs no medicine. We can only keep him quiet, and if he recov-

ers sufficiently to walk about, his servant must be always by his side. He might fall, you know."

He did not say to Valorie as he did to Phil when they two were alone:

"It is the beginning of the end, you know. He will probably get better of this attack, but another and a severer one is inevitable, and it may come at any moment. When it does, it will probably make an end of him quickly."

XLV

MORE for the satisfaction of Valorie than because of any need of his presence or any good he could do, Greg Tazewell decided to remain at Woodlands during most of the day.

In the late afternoon Mrs. Albemarle arrived, greatly to Valorie's relief. Mrs. Albemarle had the gift of cheering others and comforting them, in a very unusual measure, and her presence was almost a benediction to the younger woman, the more so when she announced her purpose to remain at Woodlands until Colonel Shenstone should get better of the attack. Under her inspiration the house took on a more cheerful aspect than it would otherwise have done, while to Valorie her presence afforded a very much needed companionship.

Mrs. Albemarle said nothing to Phil about any of the supposititious concerns she had pro-

fessed to have on her mind, but Phil easily explained this to himself. The things she had wished to consult him about, he thought, were matters of social entertainment, and these she very naturally put aside under the circumstances.

At the end of a week, Colonel Shenstone's condition was so far improved that she decided to return to town on the morrow. During the evening she managed to be left alone with Phil for half an hour or so, managing also to make the fact seem quite accidental.

"Valorie tells me you think of going to the West pretty soon, Phil," she said in an entirely casual way, as if merely making conversation.

"Yes," he answered. "Now that Val is secure against annoyance I am anxious to get back to my work. I'm planning some large enterprises, and the time is ripe for carrying them out. I'm rather impatient to get away, and but for my uncle's attack I should be leaving immediately. As it is I shall go as soon as he is well enough for me to leave him."

"So you really think he is going to get well enough for that?"

"I sincerely hope so."

"Does Greg encourage that hope?"

"Yes, in a way."

"I see,— only 'in a way' and not very confidently. I've talked with him, and I'm afraid I don't quite believe he's as hopeful as he pretends. Still I hope it will prove to be so. How queer it was in Valorie to ask Jack — Judge Albemarle, I should say — to serve as her guardian! Wasn't it?"

"Yes, it surprised me a good deal. I thought she would have chosen Greg Tazewell for that part, in view of the circumstances."

"What circumstances? I fear I'm dull, but I don't understand."

"Why, of course she is going to marry him; they're betrothed."

"Are they? I hadn't heard of that. Indeed you surprise me with the news. I should have expected Valorie to tell me of such a thing as that."

"I'm surprised that neither she nor Greg

has ever spoken to me about it either," he replied. "I've been expecting to be taken into their confidence, but they haven't told me, yet."

"Have you asked either of them about it?"

"No, naturally not. It would have been an intrusion, so long as they did not see fit to volunteer the information."

Mrs. Albemarle rose as if to pass from the porch into the house, paused a moment, stooping to pluck an early blooming flower that grew near the steps, and then turning her face full upon him said, with a queer smile upon her lips:

"Phil Shenstone, for a brainy man you are most interestingly stupid! But men always are stupid — especially brainy men."

Without explanation and without waiting for a reply, the clever woman retreated into the house to join Valorie.

Phil resolved at once to "have this thing out" with her, to seize the first opportunity for further private converse, and to question her closely as to her meaning. But in so planning he did not sufficiently allow for Mrs. Al-

bemarle's cleverness, or sufficiently appreciate her resolute determination that he should have no such opportunity. Without seeming to avoid private speech with him, and with an artfulness that concealed art, she so managed as to see him only in the presence of others during that evening and the next morning. She had said all she intended to say, all that she believed she could say without disloyalty to her sex, and she did not intend to submit to any questioning on the subject.

After she entered her carriage next morning, and just as the driver was ready to give rein to the horses, Phil thrust his head into the carriage upon some pretense of adjusting the lap cloths, and said hurriedly:

"Tell me what you meant last night."

She answered quickly:

"It's of no use. There never was a man who could understand what a woman means. Drive on Frederick. Good-bye, Valorie."

The next moment she was whirled away by the impatient horses, eager to stretch their muscles after a week of idleness in stable and paddock.

XLVI

PHIL SHENSTONE was puzzled. There seemed to be some subtly hidden meaning, something suggestive of a hint, in her words — both those spoken the evening before, and those with which she had taken leave. Still more was there a suggestion of that kind in her manner. He strolled about the plantation for an hour or so trying to read the riddle. The trouble was that in both cases the words were open to two constructions. When she had called him "stupid," she might have referred to his sensitiveness about intruding upon the reserve of Greg and Valorie, or she might have meant to cast doubt upon the accuracy of his conviction that they two were betrothed. Still more manifest was the equivocal character of her morning's reply to his question as to her meaning,— "there never was a man who could under-

stand what a woman means." Did she refer to his inability to understand her words of the night before? Or did she mean to suggest that perhaps he had misinterpreted Valorie's attitude and sentiment toward Greg Tazewell?

Question the matter as he might, he could in no wise interpret the oracular sentences.

Presently an illuminating thought arose in his mind.

"Why should I not ask Greg? We are gentlemen and we are friends. Mrs. Albemarle's words and manner seem to suggest a possibility that I have mistaken the situation. In my mind that doubt is a very slender one, but still it is a doubt. I have a right to have it resolved. I have a right to ask Greg to tell me frankly what the facts are, and he is bound to tell me. I'll do that, though I am convinced that I know the facts already. Under the circumstances it will not be an impertinence, and he cannot so regard it."

It was Phil's habit to act promptly when he had once decided to act at all. He quickened his leisurely stroll into a brisk walk, and when he learned from Valorie that Greg was not to

visit Woodlands that day unless summoned, he ordered his horse, saying to Valorie:

"I feel the need of exercise. Uncle does not need me this morning and so I think I shall go for a long ride."

His horse was a powerful one, and fresh. His own impatience grew upon him as he rode, and the gait he chose for the greater part of the way was a gallop.

Greg was reading in the porch when he rode up. He rose hastily and throwing his book aside hurried to meet his friend, asking anxiously:

"Is Colonel Shenstone worse? Has he had another stroke?"

Phil reassured him and entered the porch with him. Impatient as he was to reach results, he was determined to make no hasty approach to the subject in his mind. The matter was one to be mentioned only with dignity and a certain deference. Phil, therefore, permitted the conversation to run in customary channels for a time. He spoke of Greg's spring plowing, which he had observed as he rode through the plantation. He asked about a

clearing of new grounds which had been done during the winter, and talked of such other commonplace subjects as suggested themselves to his mind.

After awhile he interrupted all this, to say:

"Greg, you and I are friends. We are two gentlemen of Virginia, and each of us perfectly knows that the other could not be guilty of impertinent intrusion. But there are circumstances which may warrant either in asking the other a question which ordinarily he would have no right to ask and indeed would never think of asking."

"My dear Phil," interrupted the other, "I can't imagine what it is you want to ask, but I give you the fullest leave to ask it, whatever it is. I promise not to think of it as intrusive or in anyway unwarranted. What is it?"

"Thank you," said Phil. "I have been wondering why you and Val are so strangely reticent with me. In view of my close friendship for both of you, I have been unable to understand why neither of you has directly told me of your engagement."

Greg rose, slowly filled a pipe, motioning Phil to do the same, and called to a "chap"—as a young negro was always called in Virginia — to bring a coal of fire, before replying. Perhaps he needed a little time to conquer some feeling. At last he said:

"The explanation is very simple, Phil. We have not told you of our engagement because we are not engaged."

"Is it definitely broken off?"

"It has never existed. Listen, Phil. Just before you left us for the West last Fall, I addressed Valorie, and she rejected me — gently, in the kindest way possible, but very positively. She was at pains even to warn me never to approach the subject again, assuring me that her decision was final. I supposed you knew of her rejection. Everybody else does. I suppose your going away so soon afterwards prevented you from hearing of it, and since your return you've been too constantly shut up at Woodlands. Besides, people exhausted the subject during your absence and don't talk about it now, I reckon. I

should have told you, if I had suspected that you did not know."

"Thank you for telling me now. You do not intend to renew your suit?"

"Certainly not. Indeed I dare not, after what she said to me. It would be equivalent to saying I doubted her sincerity — even her veracity. Besides I believe I have pretty thoroughly conquered myself in the matter. I have no desire to marry."

"You are speaking with entire candor — reserving nothing?"

"On my word of honor, Phil."

Then, as if after all the subject was still one that he preferred not to talk or think about too much, he abruptly changed the subject.

"Come with me to the garden, Phil. It is exceptionally early this year."

"No," said the other, "I think I must ride. I'm expected at Woodlands to dinner."

"But you can't. I've sent your horse to the stable, and you're to dine with me. I have dinner at three, you know, and to-day I have the first spring lamb and the first

asparagus served in this county this year."

There was a note of pleading insistence in his tone, which Phil did not care to resist, and so the two friends passed the hours together, chiefly in looking over a box of books that Greg had just received from New York, some of them rare and curious, all of them books of value.

"It is my one extravagance," he said, "and it will cost me a good deal this year, for I find I must build an addition to the library wing of the house. The library is choked and overflowing as you see."

"Tell me about my uncle," said Phil, after they had finished the books. "Isn't he going to get completely well? He certainly seems to be growing stronger, and his mind is clearing."

"He is gaining, of course, and he will continue to gain, if he doesn't have another stroke — a thing that may happen at any moment or may not happen for months or years to come. But he will never be the man he was. He may get well enough to enjoy life, but he will never take an active part in it again. His mind is

clearing, as you say, but his old intellectual vigor can never come back to him."

As Shenstone was about to mount for the homeward ride, Tazewell said:

"I'm glad I've had you to dinner to-day. There may not be another chance. I shall probably leave for France pretty soon,— almost any day in fact."

"Why are you going abroad just now, Greg?"

"Why, you know I have accepted an invitation to deliver some lectures before the Medical School there, in exposition of one of my appliances. I told you about it last Fall, but you've doubtless forgotten."

"But you told me afterwards you had given it up?"

"I did think of giving it up, but I've reconsidered. You see medical science is rapidly advancing over there, and I want to spend a year catching up."

Phil believed he understood more than his friend had told him. Perhaps Greg Tazewell had not so completely conquered his love as he tried to believe that he had.

XLVII

IT was not until after supper that Phil had opportunity of intimate speech with Valorie. Meeting her in the hall he took her hand in his and without a word, led her out into the porch, where the air of the Virginia springtime was soft and warm, and redolent of early blooming flowers.

She withdrew her hand from his, as they seated themselves upon the edge of the porch. Phil observed the act of shyness, but made no effort to check it. He held his own love for the young woman by his side in too reverent a respect to think of trifles in connection with it. Matters were at crisis now, and nothing seemed to him of consequence but the result.

"Val," he began, "I have been dining with Greg Tazewell to-day, and he has told me something that astonishes me very much."

He paused for her answer, but she made

none. During the moment or two that he waited for it, he quite forgot the rest of the speech he had formulated in his mind for use on this occasion, and said something else of a more definite sort.

"You know I love you, Val, as I have never loved any other woman — as I can never love any other. You must have known it for a long time."

As he uttered the words he again took her hand in his, and this time she did not withdraw it. But he observed that it trembled with her emotion.

"You must have known it all the while, Val."

"You never told me," she said, chokingly.

"There were good reasons for that," he answered. "I'll explain it presently. But I tell you now that I love you, and have loved you ever since that June morning when we drove to Woodlands together, and you showed me the beauty of your soul as you danced by the roadside in your enjoyment of the loveliness all about you. Tell me that you love me in return. Tell me, Val."

"I suppose I do — no that isn't an honest way of putting it, Phil, and I want to be honest with you always. Yes, I love you."

At this point there was a brief interruption of speech, but as his arm was about her waist and she suffered her head to lie upon his shoulder after he had drawn it there, speech seemed not very necessary.

After a while, in answer to some question that arose in her own mind, she said:

"I think I must have loved you, Phil, ever since that June morning you speak of, though I didn't know it then, or till long afterwards. It was then that you began being good to me, tenderly considerate, and you've always been that. You are so big and strong and so gentle — how could I help loving you, Phil? But I've tried hard not to love you — very, very hard."

"But why, Val?"

"Because I didn't think you loved me, and you know it isn't nice for a girl to let herself love a man who doesn't love her first — if she can help it. I have been very sure — especially since you came back from the West,

that you didn't want me to love you — except in the way I love Uncle Butler and the memory of my father. It has troubled me very, very much."

She did not say what it was that had troubled her very, very much, but as Phil asked for no specifications it is to be supposed that he understood.

* * *

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A little later he returned to his former theme.

"Let me tell you all about things, Val. Before I went away I had closely observed you and Greg together —"

"That was when I was quarreling with him for his cold-bloodedness in Jane's case," she interrupted.

"Perhaps so, but I had no means of knowing that or guessing it. I was firmly convinced that he and you loved each other and were engaged. That is why I went away. I flinched from the prospect of hearing the truth from you or from him, just then. I wanted to use myself to it, to harden myself to the

thought that I had lost you, before being told about it. It was weak in me and cowardly, I know —"

"No, not that," she said with emphasis; "Not that, not cowardly."

"Thank you. When I returned I again observed you and him together —"

"That was when I was quarreling with him about what I thought was his neglect of Uncle Butler. He explained it at last and we made it up. If it had been anything else, I should have told you."

"So I thought, and as you didn't tell me I sometimes felt a good deal hurt. I had no sort of doubt that you and he were engaged, and I have wondered not a little that neither of you valued my friendship enough to take me into your confidence in a matter so tenderly touching the lives of both of you. That is why I have been planning to go to the West again, never to return."

A gentle pressure of her hand was her only response.

"Not until this morning did the least doubt arise in my mind as to the truth of my con-

viction that you and he were engaged. When it did arise I went at once to Greg, and as one gentleman of Virginia to another, asked him to tell me the facts of the case. He did so, fully, freely and generously. But why had you never told me, Val, that he had addressed you and that you had refused him?"

"It wouldn't have been nice in me to talk of that," she answered. "Only heartless flirts go about boasting of their 'conquests'—how I detest the vulgar phrase! Greg Tazewell offered me the love of an honorable man. I could not accept it, but I respected it and I respected him."

"You are right, of course, Val. You are always right in your feelings — always true and gentle and womanly."

"I don't know about that, though I try hard to be what you say. Oh, Phil, you don't know how happy I am!"

"I think I do," he said, as he plucked a spear of snow-white hyacinth on which a stream of light from a window fell, and deftly fastened it in her hair.

Long before these two quitted the porch and

passed into the house, the servants within were wondering why they sat so long out there in the night air. If the servitors could have seen what happened as the two bade each other good-night at the foot of the stairs, perhaps the wiser ones among them could have guessed, as Mrs. Albemarle did next day when she received a note from Phil. It said only:

"You were wrong. A man does sometimes find out what a woman means."

XLVIII

IT was Valorie's custom to go into the garden in the very early morning to start operations there and to superintend the gathering of vegetables for the day's use while the dew was yet on them. Phil, of course, was at the stables at daylight to see the farm animals fed and curried for the day.

On the morning following his conference with Valorie, he left the stables about sunrise, and by a curious coincidence was in the garden when Valorie got there — a thing that had not happened before.

They strolled about for a time — for the gardeners had not come yet — and then seated themselves in a circular arbor or summer house, which was closely covered with yellow Jessamine vines.

"Uncle Butler must be the first to hear our news, Phil," said Valorie, "and if you don't

mind, I want to be the one to tell him."

"It shall be as you wish, Val. I don't care who tells such news."

"But you know, Phil, it can't take place for a long time yet."

She didn't say what it was that must be thus postponed, and perhaps it was not necessary. She went on to explain:

"You know I once told you I would never leave Uncle Butler, and I meant it. It can't take place till he is well and strong again."

"We'll see what he says about it, Val, but in any case, everything shall be as you wish."

At that moment the head gardener appeared and Valorie set to work at her morning's tasks, Phil, meanwhile, busying himself with the collection of a bunch of flowers for her. As she took them from his hand, one delicate blossom attracted her attention. After studying it for an instant, she said:

"Look, Phil. I wonder if that isn't what Philip James Bailey meant when he wrote in 'Festus' that 'Her cheek had the pale, pearly pink of sea-shells — nature's sweetest tint.'"

"Perhaps so, but he spoiled it all — as he

often spoiled his best sentences, by adding something at once forced and commonplace."

"Yes, I know what you mean. The passage goes on: 'She looked as though she lived, one half might deem, on roses sopped in silver dew,' and that's very bad. But I don't agree with you that it spoils the other, because one can just think of the other by itself. I always do that in reading 'Festus.' Isn't it a glorious morning!" As she spoke she saw that the gardener had passed out of sight behind some shrubbery, and yielding to an impulse born of the morning and of her own joyous mood, she executed a fragmentary *pas seul* on the smooth surface of the path.

Phil clapped his hands in applause.

"That's the way you danced by the roadside on that most glorious of all June mornings that ever dawned."

"Is it? I'm glad. I feel as I did then,—only ever so much happier."

A moment later, she said:

"Oh, Phil, after I've told Uncle Butler about it, you must go and ask him if we may, you know. He has a right to expect that."

"Of course. I'll go to him the moment I hear from you that you've told him. I'm subject to orders now, you know."

"Please don't joke, Phil. It hurts me. It seems — well, sacrilegious — almost blasphemous."

The glee with which the old gentleman received the news was cheering to behold.

"It is what I have wanted from the first," he said, "but lately I have feared it might never happen. You two seemed to be drawing apart, and it has troubled me a great deal, Little Minx."

"I'm sorry, Uncle. But we weren't drawing apart, really and truly, Uncle. Phil will explain all that. I'll go and send him to you now. You see, we can't think it's all so until he asks your permission and you say yes."

"But suppose I say no, Little Minx?"

"You won't, Uncle Butler. You never say no when I want you to say yes."

"That's only because I can't. I haven't resolution enough."

When alone with Phil, Colonel Shenstone said:

"I want you to oblige me, my boy — to do me the greatest favor in your power."

"I'll do it, Uncle, whatever it is."

"I want you and my Little Minx to be married here at Woodlands and just as soon as possible. You see, Phil, I am not deceived. I am much older than my years, as old as my arteries, as Greg puts it. I'm comfortable now, and the paralysis is leaving me. But I'm not deceived. I shall have another stroke and after that the end. It may come at any time, and before it comes I want to see you and the Little Minx married, so that I may know positively who are to be master and mistress of Woodlands when I am gone. You can't understand my feeling perhaps, or fully appreciate it. But ever since the first Shenstone established this plantation in 1635, it has been the seat of our family. There has always been a Shenstone to maintain the honor of our name, to dispense a generous hospitality here, and to do justice, love mercy and live uprightly. You are the fittest man I know to be the next in our line, and of all the women in the world my Little Minx is the one I should

choose to be the mother of the future men and women of our race. I cannot talk longer. It tires me so to think, but you understand what I want. Go now, and hurry matters all you can. As you go out, please tell Valorie I want to see her."

When Valorie went to him, he said:

"I've talked till I'm tired, Little Minx. I've told Phil what I want him and you to do. He'll explain it all to you. Promise me you'll do it, won't you?"

"I'll do anything in the world you ask, Uncle Butler. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I know it, Little Minx. God bless you."

XLIX

IN aid of Colonel Shenstone's purpose to have the wedding as early as possible, Phil and Valorie suggested that it should be entirely private, thus avoiding the necessity of preparation. But the old Virginian would not consent to that.

"When there is a marriage at Woodlands," he said, "it is an occasion for rejoicing. There must be feasting and dancing. And it can be done. Let every available servant set to work at once to get things ready and issue your invitations for this day week."

To these two, his word was law, and the matter was arranged as he desired. Under the curious rule of conduct that prevailed in Virginia, Phil must not pass a night under the same roof with Valorie after their engagement was announced. So the moment Greg Taze-

well received word of the matter, he invited Phil to take quarters in his house. To his friend he said:

"I shall not be there myself after to-morrow, old fellow, as I am to sail for Europe on Saturday. But the house will be open and the servants will look after you."

"Then you will not be at the wedding? I had hoped you would be my first groomsman."

In Virginia at that time the term "first groomsman" meant much the same that "best man" does now.

"No," answered Greg. "I'm sorry, but my ship sails on Saturday."

Phil thought he understood and he asked no further questions. But Greg said, presently:

"I'll send the bride something from New York as a token of my friendship, which will always be the very warmest in my heart for both of you."

Mrs. Albemarle simply "moved to Woodlands," as she said, the moment the date of the wedding was fixed. But while busying herself there both night and day, in Valorie's

behalf, she was also issuing orders by mail concerning the preparations that were making at her own house for a reception which she was to give to the young couple a few days after the wedding. They were not going to make a wedding journey, for that would leave Colonel Shenstone in loneliness, and though he insisted, neither of them would consent to that.

The festivities at Woodlands and in Richmond were at an end before the waning of April.

One morning in June Colonel Shenstone was walking in the grounds with Phil supporting him and Valorie walking on the other side, when suddenly he reeled so that Phil had difficulty in preventing a heavy fall. Summoning help the young man had the unconscious form carried into the house. Consciousness never returned, and after a few days of coma, Colonel Butler Shenstone was gathered to his fathers, after a life of such honor and uprightness and gentle human sympathy as befitted the race from which he was descended.

* * *

A day or two after the funeral the will was

read. The dead man had given the historic old plantation and everything else that he owned to Valorie. He had made the gift precious to her soul by the terms in which the bequest was set forth:

"She brought light into my life when it was dark; warmth, when it was cold; love, after years of lovelessness. To her I have given all that I have to give of a material nature, and to it all I add the blessing of one whose life she made joyous in its end."

* * *

Two days after the will was read, Phil said to Valorie:

"It is not good for you to be here for a time. You need change of scene and a chance to rest and grow strong again. I have been telegraphing. One of my steamboats is loading at Pittsburg for New Orleans. She will take only through freight, and I have arranged that she shall have no passengers but you and me, and your maid of course. Fortunately she is a slow boat and will be heavily laden. We will make the journey — just you and I — in leisurely, restful fashion."

"Can we stop at Memphis, where my father lies?"

"Yes, Val. That and everything else that you desire. I have only one purpose in life now, and that is to make my wife the happiest woman on earth."

"Thank you, Phil, I am already that."

Such was her only reply — in words.

THE END