

KITTY'S CHOICE.

A STORY OF BERRYTOWN.

BY

REBECCA HARDING DAVIS,

AUTHOR OF "DALLAS GALBRAITH," "WAITING FOR THE VERDICT,"

"LIFE IN THE IRON MILLS," ETC.



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KITTY'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

A STRAGGLING old house, painted yellow, and set down between a corn-field and the village pasture for family cows; old walnut trees growing close to its back and front, young walnut trees thrusting themselves unhindered through beet and tomato patches, and even through the roof of the hen-nery in the rear, which had been rebuilt to accommodate them, spreading a heavy shade all about, picturesque but unprofitable.

Old Peter Guinness used to sit on the doorstep every hot summer evening, smoking his cigar, and watching the hens go clucking up to roost in the lower branches and the cattle gathered underneath.

"What a godsend the trees are to those poor beasts!" he said a dozen times every summer.

"Yes. We risk dampness and neuralgia and ague to oblige the town cows," Mrs. Guinness would reply calmly.

"I shall cut them down this fall, Fanny. I'm not unreasonable, I hope. Don't say a word more: I forgot your neuralgia, my dear. Down they come!"

But they never did come down. Mrs. Guinness never expected them to come down, any more than she expected Peter to give up his cigar. When they were first married she explained to him daily the danger of smoking, the effect of nicotine on the lungs, liver and stomach: then she would appeal to him on behalf of his soul against this debasing temptation of the devil. "It is such a gross way to fall," she would plead—"such a mean, sensual appetite!"

Peter was always convinced, yielding a ready assent to all her arguments: then he would turn his mild, cow-like regards on her: "But, my dear, I smoke the best Partagas: they're very expensive, I assure you."

Long ago his wife had left him to go his own way downward. As with smok-

ing, so with other ungodly traits and habits. She felt his condemnation was sure. It was a case for submission at the female prayer-meeting; bemoaning his eternal damnation became indeed a part of her religion, but the matter was not one to render her apple-cheeks a whit less round or her smile less placid. The mode in which Peter earned their bread and butter interfered more with her daily comfort and digestion. Dealing in second-hand books, half of which were dramatic works, was a business not only irreligious, but ungenteel. She never passed under the swinging sign over the door without feeling that her cross was indeed heavy, and the old parlor, which had been turned into a shop, she left to the occupancy of her husband and Kitty.

Out of the shop, one summer afternoon, had come for an hour the perpetual scrape, scrape of Peter's fiddle. He jumped up at last, suddenly, bow in hand, and went to the doorstep, where his stepdaughter sat sewing. From the words he had overheard in the next room he was sure that the decisive hour of life had just struck for the girl, and there she was stitching her flannel and singing about "Alpine horns, tra-la!" She ought to have known, he thought, without hearing. A woman ought to be of the kindred of the old seeresses, and by the divine ichor or the animal instinct in her know when the supreme moment of love approached.

But what kind of love was this coming to Kitty?

He twanged the strings just over her head, to keep her from hearing, but quite out of tune, he was so agitated with the criticalness of the moment. But then most moments were critical to Peter Guinness, and agitation, his wife was wont smilingly to assure him, was his normal condition.

He anxiously watched Catharine's restless glances into the room where her

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mother and the clergyman sat in council. She had guessed their object then? She was opposed to it?

A thoughtful frown contracted her forehead. Suddenly it cleared: "Oysters? Yes, it is oysters Jane is broiling. I'm horribly hungry. I could go round the back way and bring us a little lunch in here, father. They'll never see us behind the books."

"Shame on you, Kit! You're nothing but a greedy child." But he laughed with a sudden sense of relief. She really was nothing yet but a healthy child with a very sharp remembrance of meal-times. It would be years before her mother or Mr. Muller would talk to her of the marriage or the work they had planned for her.

"Just as you please," taking up her flannel again. "Very likely it will be midnight before we have supper: Mr. Muller often forgets to eat altogether. From what mother tells me, I suppose approving conscience and a plate of grits now and then carry him through the day. It's different with me."

"Very different, Kitty. Don't flatter yourself that you will ever be like him in any way. William Muller is a Christian of the old type. Though, as for grits, a man should not disregard the requirements of the stomach too much," with an inward twinge as he smelt the oysters. He began to play thoughtfully, while Kitty looked again through the book-shop to the room beyond. The books about her always made unfamiliar pictures when one looked at them suddenly. They lay now in such weights of age and mustiness on the floor, the counters, the beams overhead, the yellow walls of them were lost in such depths of cobwebs and gloom, that they made a dark retreating frame, in which she sat like a clear, fine picture in the doorway, the yellow sunset light behind her. She could see her mother looking in at her, and the plump, neat little clergyman in his tight-fitting ribbed suit of brown and spotless shirt-front. He gently stroked his small black imperial as he talked, but his eyes behind their gold eye-glasses never wavered in their

mild regard of her. Kitty grew restless under it.

"Mr. Muller is talking of the class of books you keep, father," she said, lowering her voice: "I'm sure of it. They are as unsavory in his nostrils as to the reformers in the village. They'd all excommunicate you if they could."

"Guinness, Book Agent, Kitty," finishing his tune with a complacent scrape, "has been known for twenty years, while Berrytown belongs to yesterday. But the intolerance of these apostles of toleration is unaccountable. They mean well, though. I really never knew people mean better; yet—" He finished the sentence with a shake of the head, solemnly burying the fiddle in its case.

Both he and Catharine turned involuntarily to the window. Five years ago there had been half a dozen old buildings like the Book-house stretched along Indian Creek, the roofs curled and black, the walls bulging with age and damp. Now, there was Berrytown.

Berrytown was the Utopia in actual laths, orchards and bushel-measures of the advance-guard of the reform party in the United States. It was the capital of Progress, where social systems and raspberries grew miraculously together. Thither hied every man who had any indictment against the age, or who had invented an inch-rule of a theory which was to bring the staggering old world into shape. Woman-Suffrage, Free-Love, Spiritualism, off-shoots from Orthodoxy in every sect, had there food and shelter. Radical New England held the new enterprise dear as the apple of her eye: Western New York stretched toward it hands of benediction. As Catharine looked out, not a tree stood between her and the sky-line. Row after row of cottages replete with white paint and the modern conveniences; row after row of prolific raspberry bushes on the right, cranberry bogs on the left—the great Improved Canning-houses for fruit flanking the town on one side, Muller's Reformatory for boys on the other. The Book-house behind its walnut trees, its yellow walls clammy with lichen, was undeniably a blot, the sole sign of age and conserva-

tism in a landscape which, from horizon to horizon, Reform swept with the newest of brooms. No wonder that the Berrytownites looked askance at it, and at the book-fanciers who had haunted the place for years, knowing old Guinness to be the keenest agent they could put upon the trail of a pamphlet or relic.

The old man grew surly sometimes when sorely goaded by the new-comers. "There's not a man of them, Kitty," he would say, "but has ideas; and there's not an idea in the town five years old." But generally he was cordial with them all, going off into rapt admiration of each new prophet as he arose, and he would willingly have stood cheek by jowl with them in their planting and watering and increase if they had not snubbed him from the first. Book-shops full of old plays, and a man who talked of Scott's width of imagination and Clay's statesmanship, were indigestible matter which Berrytown would gladly have spewed out of her mouth. "What have aimless imagination and temporizing policy to do with the Advancement of Mankind? Dead weight, sir, dead weight! which but clogs the wheels of the machine." Any schoolboy in Berrytown could have so reasoned you the matter. While Catharine was growing up, therefore, the walnut trees had shut the Guinnesses into complete social solitude until deliverance came in the shape of Mr. Muller.

CHAPTER II.

BESIDES her supper now, Catharine wanted her share of this visitor. Nothing else, in fact, came in or went out of her life. Outside lay emancipated Berrytown, to unemancipated Kitty only a dumb panorama: inside, her meals, her lessons and perpetual consultations with her mother on bias folds and gussets while they made their dresses or sewed for the Indian missions. Kitty was quite willing to believe that the Berrytown women were mad and unsexed, but ought the events of life to consist of beef and new dresses and far-off Sioux? She laughed good-humoredly at her own

grumbling, but she looked longingly out of the window at the girls going by chattering in the evenings with their sweet-hearts; and certainly the Man coming into her life had affected her not unpleasantly. Not that the clergyman, with his small jokes and small enthusiasms, was any high revelation to her mind; but there was no other.

"It's something to hear a heavy step about the house, and to see the carpet kicked crooked," she said sometimes. Her mother would shake her hand gently and smile.

She shook her head and smiled in precisely the same way now. Mr. Muller, who had grown excited as he talked, felt a wave of insipid propriety wash over his emotions, bringing them to a dead level.

"However the matter may conclude," said Mrs. Guinness pleasantly, "why should you and I lose our self-control, Mr. Muller? Now, why should we? Ah?"

There was something numbing in the very note of prolonged interrogation. The folds of Mrs. Guinness's glossy alpaca lay calmly over her plump breast; her colorless hair (both her own and the switch) rolled and rose high above her head; her round cheeks were unchanging pink, her light eyes steady; the surprised lift of those flaxen eyelashes had made many a man ashamed of his emotions and his slipshod grammar together.

Mr. Muller was humbled, he did not know why. "It is practical enough, I suppose," he said irritably, "to ask what Catharine herself thinks of marriage with me?"

"You never tried to discover for yourself?" with an attempt at roguish shrewdness.

"No, upon my honor, no!" The little man fairly lost his breath in his haste. "I have a diffidence in speaking to her."

"To Kitty!" with an amused, indulgent smile, which worsted him again.

He struggled back into the hardest common sense: "Of course it is not diffidence in me. I feel no hesitation in discussing the question of marriage with

anybody else. My family wish me to marry: my sister has suggested several young ladies to me in well-to-do religious families in the city. There are marriageable young women here, too, whose acquaintance I have made with that object in view. Very intelligent girls: they have given me some really original views on religion and politics. One can talk to them about anything—social evils or what not. But Catharine—she is so young! It is like broaching marriage to a baby!"

Mrs. Guinness was silent. The sudden silence struck like a dead wall before the little man, and bewildered and alarmed him: "Perhaps, Mrs. Guinness, you think I ought not to look upon Catharine as another man would? I should regard a wife only as a fellow-servant of the Lord? I oughtn't to—to make love to Kitty, in short?"

"She is a dear, pious child. I love to think of her in the midst of your Reformed boys," said the lady evasively.

There was another pause. "Of course, you know," he said with an anxious laugh, "I never had a serious thought of those young ladies chosen by my sister. Social position or wealth does not weigh with me, Mrs. Guinness—not a feather!" earnestly. If he really had meant to give her a passing reminder that marriage with Kitty would be a step down the social grade for him, he was thoroughly scared out of his intention. As he talked, reiterating the same thing again and again, the heat rose into his neatly-shaved face and little aquiline nose.

Mrs. Guinness observed his agitation with calm triumph. She knew but one ladder into heaven, and that, short and narrow, was through her own Church. Kitty was stepping up on a high rung of it. Once the wife of this good Christian man, and her soul was safe. A sudden vision of her flitted before her mother in grave but rich attire (fawn-colored velvet, for instance, for next winter, trimmed with brown fur), to suit her place as the wife of the wealthy Muller, head of the congregation and the Reformatory school: she would be

instant, too, at prayer-meetings and Dorcas societies. This was Mrs. Guinness's world, and she reasoned accordingly to the laws of it. She rejoiced as Hannah did when she had safely placed her child within the temple of the Lord.

And yet with that hint of the social position of the Mullers had come the certainty to her that this marriage could never be. A shadow had stood suddenly before her—a boy's face, the only one before which her calm, complacent soul had ever quailed or shrunk. The pleasant, apple-cheeked woman, like the rest of us, had her ghost—her sin unwhipped of justice. She stood calmly as Mr. Muller hurried his explanations, piling them one on top of the other, but she did not hear a word of them. If he should ever hear Hugh's story! Dead though he was, if that were known not a beggar in the street would marry Catharine.

But since Fanny Guinness was an amiable, pink-cheeked belle in the village choir, she had never turned her back on an enemy: why should she now? Hugh Guinness had hated her as the vicious always hate the good, but she was thankful she had smiled and greeted him with Christian forbearance to the very last. As for this danger coming from him, now that he was dead, the safest way was to drag it to the light at once. All things worked together for good to those who loved the Lord—if you managed them right.

"Of course," she said, as if just finishing a sentence, "you are indifferent to social rank. And yet it will be no slight advantage to you that Catharine has no swarm of needy kinsfolk. Her own father died when she was a baby. Mr. Guinness is the only near friend she has ever known except myself. He had a son when I married him—" The boy's name stuck in her throat. For a moment she felt as the murderer does, forced to touch his victim with his naked hand. "Hugh—Hugh Guinness—was the lad's name."

"I never heard of him," indifferently.

"No, it is not probable you should. Long before Berrytown was built he

went to Nicaragua. He died there. Well," with a little wave of the hand, "there you have Kitty's whole family. It will be better that she should be so untrammelled, for the interests of the school."

"The school? I'm not a Reformatory machine altogether, I suppose!" He had been watching Catharine, who was moving about in the shop. When he was not in sight of her he always remembered that she was a mere child, to be instructed from the very rudiments up after marriage, and that the Guinnesses were ten degrees, at least, below him in the social scale. But she was near—she was coming! The complacent smile went out of his trig little features: he moved his tongue about to moisten his dry lips before he could speak. He was absolutely frightened at himself. "There's more than the school to be thought of, Mrs. Guinness," he blurted out. "I—I love Catharine. And I want this matter settled. Immediately—within the hour."

"Very well. You will be satisfied with the result, I am sure, Mr. Muller. I give Catharine to you with all my heart." But she did not look any more at ease than he. They both turned to look at Kitty, who came toward them in her usual headlong gait through the shop.

CHAPTER III.

HER mother scanned Catharine when she came in as she had never done before. She was "taking stock" of her, so to speak: she wished to know what was in the girl to have secured this lover, or what there was to hold him should he ever hear Hugh's damning story. Her eye ran over her. She was able to hold her motherly fondness aside while she judged her. Kitty was flushed and awakened from head to foot with the excitement of this single visitor.

"At her age," thought Mrs. Guinness, "I could have faced a regiment of lovers. Kitty's weak: I always felt her brain was small—small. She has nothing of my face, or address either. There's

no beauty there but youth, and her curious eyes." She never had been sure whether she admired Kitty's eyes or not.

But clergymen and reformers were as vulnerable as other men to soft, flushing cheeks and moist lips, and Mr. Muller, as she judged from his agitation, was no wiser than the rest. He pressed nervously forward, bridging his nose with his eye-glasses.

"Catharine, my child, will you walk out with me? I wish to consult you on a little matter."

"Oh, with pleasure," said Kitty.

Her mother stood aghast. Like the mass of women, she viewed the matter of love from the sentimental, L. E. L. stand-point. It had been a forbidden subject to Kitty. Her heart, her mother supposed, slept, like the summer dawn, full of dreams, passion, dewy tenderness, waiting for the touch of the coming day. What kind of awakening would the plump "Will you marry me?" of this fat little clergyman be? In the street of Berrytown, too! in the middle of the afternoon! If it were only moonlight!

"Pray wait until evening, Catharine: you're always famished for your supper," she cried anxiously.

"But I'm not hungry now at all," running up the stairs. For politeness' sake Kitty would lie with a smile on her mouth though a fox were gnawing at her stomach. Something in her running reminded Mr. Muller that she was a school-girl and he a middle-aged noted reformer. He fidgeted about the room, looking at the prints of La Fayette and Franklin on the whitewashed wall, and the Tomb of Washington done in faded chenilles by Mr. Guinness's first wife, buttoning his gloves with an anxious frown.

"I'm sure I don't know what my sister Maria will say to this," after one or two uneasy laughs. "I never mean to be eccentric, yet somehow I always am different from anybody else. Now, in church-matters— I never intended to leave the orthodox communion, yet when I showed how my Church was clinging to worn-out dogmas, and opened my Reformatory in Berrytown, the

Free-Religionists in Boston seized me, and printed my opening sermon under one cover with that of an Oneidaite and a Spiritualist. Do I look like a medium or a Free-Lover? That was going a little too far, I take it."

"Ah?" came Mrs. Guinness's calm interrogatory. No more.

William Muller was a man of culture and a certain force in one direction, and when pleading the cause of the vicious children to whom he was giving his life could hold men of real mental strength attentive and subdued. He did not know why, when this commonplace little woman had her steady eye on him, he should always dribble out all his weakness to her. But he did it—talked on in a leaky way of his squabble with his church and the praises he had received in newspapers for his school, until he heard Kitty's step on the stairs.

"Ah! there she is!" he cried relieved.

Catharine came back, close buttoned in a brown dress, with high-laced boots, and a light stick in her hand. She used to call it her alpenstock, and make all Switzerland out of the New Jersey sands with it. She ran in to kiss her father good-bye, blushing and delighted. It was the first time she had ever walked with any man but himself. "Here's an adventure!" she whispered. Every day she and Peter expected an adventure before night. She drew back startled at the strange, uneasy look he gave her. Her mother, too, pulled her hastily away, and walked beside her to the gate.

"Child," she whispered breathlessly, "he is your lover."

"Lover?" said Kitty aloud. "Lover?" But Mr. Muller joined her at the moment, and opening the gate motioned for her to precede him. They went down the quiet street together.

Mrs. Guinness went back and watched them from the shop-window. "It is as I thought," she said triumphantly.

Peter nodded. She came behind him, leaning on his shoulder. "It was only proper for me to speak to him of—of—" It was fifteen years since Hugh's name had passed between them.

"Whatever was necessary to protect

you and Catharine," he said quietly. She pressed her hands on his forehead beneath his wig, and presently he drew one of them down and held it to his lips, thinking how forbearing she had been with his boy. Mrs. Guinness went up stairs then and knelt down by the bed. She was rather fond of the exercise which she called praying—taking a larger image of herself into her confidence. Her one idea of Him was that He could provide comfortably here and elsewhere for herself and Catharine. But to-day her conscience irritated her like a nettle. Could it be that she was at soul tricky? Could God hold her, rigorous church-member, fond wife and mother as she was, guilty of this boy's blood? Nettles, however, do not sting very deeply. She rose presently, unfolded her work, and sat sewing and singing a hymn, a complacent smile on her good-humored face.

Down in the shop Peter had taken out the violin again, and was playing some nameless old air, into the two or three monotonous notes of which had crept an infinite stillness and longing. He often played it, but only when he was alone, for he would not allow Kitty to hear any but merry, vivacious music.

CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE, Catharine and Mr. Muller walked down the street in absolute silence, Kitty bearing herself with her usual grave politeness, though there was a quizzical laugh in her eyes. "Lover? My lover?" she thought. But she did not blush, as some other innocent girls would have done. She had never talked an hour in her life to a young man, or heard from other girls their incessant chirping of "he—he," like that of birds in spring wooing their mates. Her nearest acquaintance with lovers was old Peter's rendering of Romeo or Othello. She remembered them well enough as her eye furtively ran over the jaunty little figure beside her. "Is his hose ungartered, his beard neglected, his shoe untied?" she thought. "Pshaw! he is

not Orlando, any more than I am Rosalind." Her mother had been mistaken, that was all: she let the matter slip easily past her. There was a certain tough common sense in Catharine that summarily sent mistakes and sentimental fancies to the right about.

"Mr. Muller, finding the words he wished to speak would not come at once, and ashamed of joggling on in silence, began to overflow with the ordinary ideas of which he was full. They passed the grape-packing house. "Eight thousand boxes despatched last season, Catharine! And there is the Freedmen's Agency. Three teachers supported, five hundred primers furnished to Virginia alone since January, and I really forget the number of Bibles. But the world moves: yes indeed. And I think sometimes Berrytown moves in the van."

"I've no doubt of that," said Kitty politely. "Dear me! Five hundred spelling-books!" But she felt humiliated. She had neither picked grapes nor taught freedmen. What thin wisps of hair these women had stopping to speak to Mr. Muller! She put her hand suddenly to the back of her head.

"Those are employées in the canning-house," he said as they passed on. "One is educating herself as a short-hand reporter, and the other has a lecture ready for next winter on Shakespeare's Women."

"What admirable persons they must be! Ah! now I have it right!" setting her hat higher on the light chestnut coils. Mr. Muller looked, and his eye rested there. She knew that, though the back of her head was toward him. But lover? Nonsense! He meant no doubt to propose that she should go into the type-setting business or stenography.

Now, to tell Kitty's secret, she had had her love-affair her mother knew nothing about, which made her purblind in this matter. It was this: There was a certain cave (originally a spring-house) behind the walnut trees, quite covered over with trumpet-vines and partridge-berries. She had a bench there, from which she could see only the shady old house and the sun going down. When

she was a child of about eight, alone all day long, year in and out, she had taken down this bench, and working stealthily and blushing terribly, had made it large enough for two. She never allowed anybody, not even Peter, dearest of all, to come into the cave or sit on the bench afterward. What her childish fancy of an unknown friend was, or how it grew and altered with her years, only she knew, though after she was grown she told her father of a certain Sir Guy in some of his crusading stories in whom she had believed as a fact. "I actually thought he would come to woo me," she said laughing, "and I had a castle where I sat and waited for him. There never was a child so full of absurd fancies."

But she never said where the castle was, and she was fond still of sitting alone for hours on the old bench, over which the shade grew heavier year by year, and the moonlight crept with more mysterious glitter. She came in sometimes when she had been there in the evening, and the sound of old Peter's violin alone broke the silence, with her cheeks feverish, as though there had been an actual presence with her to share her secret thoughts. The only living being she had ever taken into her hiding-place was, oddly enough, a baby of whom she was fond. It happened to fall asleep in her arms one day, and Catharine stole out with it and sat on the old seat, feeling its warm breath on her breast. The girl was shaken by an emotion which she did not understand: her blood grew hot, her breath came and went, she stroked the baby's hand and foot, kissed it, glanced about her with eyes guilty yet pure.

But it is certain Kitty had no thought of her cave this afternoon. Mr. Muller and his affairs were quite another matter. There was an awkward silence. Mr. Muller was collecting his forces: he cleared his throat. "Catharine—" he said.

"Ah, William!" cried a clear, well-toned voice behind them. He turned, half annoyed and half relieved, to meet a young lady in gray, stepping alertly

from the doorway of the Water-cure House.

"Maria? This is my sister Maria, Miss Vogdes."

The lady looked at Kitty—a steady, straightforward look—then held out her hand. It was a large, warm, hearty hand, and gripped yours like a man's. Kitty took it, but felt like shirking the eyes. She had no mind to be so weighed and measured. She had an uncomfortable consciousness that her inner nature was all bared and sorted by this agreeable young woman in this first moment to the last odd and end in it, though she could not have put the consciousness into words.

"Going to the school, William? I am."

"Well—yes, we will go there." He turned irresolutely, and they walked together down the plank pathway, Kitty with an oppressive sense of having fallen into the clutch of one of the Primal Forces, who was about to settle her destiny for her; in which she stumbled almost on the truth. Miss Muller was quite aware of the fact of her brother's visits at the book-shop, and their motive. She glanced at her watch: she could give herself half an hour to find out what stuff was in the girl, though it hardly needed so long. "A good type of the Domestic Woman in the raw state," she thought. (She always jotted down her thoughts sharply to herself, as a busy shopkeeper makes entries in his day-book.) "Pulpy, kissable. A vine to which poor William would appear an oak. A devoted wife, and, if he died, a gay widow, ready to be a fond wife to somebody else."

"What do you mean to make of yourself, Miss Vogdes?" she snapped suddenly, just as Kitty was counting the hen-coops of the society in the field they were passing, and wondering how she could contrive to get a pair of their Cochín Chinas.

"To make?" stammered Kitty ("I knew she would take me by the throat somehow," she thought)—"of myself?—Why, I am Peter Guinness's daughter."

"You poor child!" Miss Muller laugh-

ed. It was a very merry, infectious laugh. She laid her hand on Kitty's shoulder gently, as though she had been a helpless kitten. "Now you see how our social system works, William. Ask a boy that question, and his answer comes pat—a doctor, carpenter, what not. In any case, he has a career, an independent soul and identity. This poor girl is—Peter Guinness's daughter, is content to be that. Though perhaps," turning sharply on her, "she thinks of the day when she will be the wife of somebody, the mother of children. Those two ideas are enough to fill the brains of most women."

Mr. Muller colored, and smiled significantly to himself. Catharine looked at her with a grave suspense, but made no answer.

"Yes," Miss Muller went on, a certain heat coming into her delicate face, "that contents the most of them—to be the fool or slave of a lover or a husband or son. 'The perfume and suppliance of a minute—no more but that.'"

She walked on in silence after this, and Catharine scanned her quietly. She was not at all the mad woman Mrs. Guinness had always described her—not at all what Kitty had fancied a lecturer on woman suffrage, a manager of the Water-cure and a skillful operating surgeon must be. She was little, pretty, frail, with a very genuine look and voice—almost as young as Kitty, and far more tastefully dressed. Catharine eyed her wonderful coiffure with envy, and was quite sure those rosy-tipped, well-kept fingers never had anything to do with cutting up dead babies.

Mr. Muller at the moment was comparing the two girls critically. The point on which he dwelt longest was that his sister's eyes, fine, limpid and brown, were those of an actress, acting to herself very probably. They went through the whole imperative mood—exhorted, commanded, entreated in five minutes: even a certain woeful sadness which came into them at times, and was there now, was quite bare and ready to be seen of all men.

"She is always on review before her-

self: she is conscious of herself from head to foot," he thought with shrewdness only born out of long knowledge. "Her very toes, I've no doubt, say to each other, 'I, Maria.'"

As for his future wife, her eyes were given her to see with, nothing more. "And she looks out with them, never in," he reflected complacently. For he had come by this time to regard her as his future wife. It seemed quite natural when Maria presently took Kitty in hand as one of the family, and began to manage for her as she did for them all, from Grandfather Hicks down to the dog Tar.

"I think, William, Miss Vogdes has the maternal instinct largely developed," looking at her face and the shape of her head as a naturalist would at a new bug. "You could find work for her in here," unlatching the gate of the Reformatory school. "She could serve humanity here just as well as if she had more—more—well, we'll say stamina."

"Precisely what I thought of," cheerfully. "You've hit the nail on the head about her, Maria." He was a peaceable, affectionate fellow at bottom. He had never hoped that his sister would tolerate Kitty, and women's squabbles in a family he abhorred, like every other man; and here she was extending a hospitable greeting, finding work for Kitty already. *Io triumphe!*

"Suppose you show Miss Vogdes the institution, sister?" he said, rubbing his eye-glasses and putting them on again in a flutter of pleasure and cordiality.

Miss Muller nodded authoritatively, and he fell into the background.

"You'll observe, Miss Vogdes," with a laugh and shrug, "Berrytown has given its best of æsthetic instincts here: five square stories painted white, with green shutters; pebble-walks; six straight evergreens to testify of the Beautiful. Inside—here we are! Parlor: yellow-pine floors, spotless; green paper blinds in the windows, that hang stirless the year round. This is the kitchen: white boards, shining caldrons. William, show the soup."

Mr. Muller gravely held up a ladleful: "Beef and cabbage. To each

child we allow per diem three parts of animal food, three purely farinaceous, four vegetable. The proper scale, I hold, of healthful nourishment," putting back the ladle. He had not spilled a drop.

"Dining-room," continued Miss Muller: "more white boards; shining tin plates; these three hundred little figures in blue jeans ranged against the wall are the—the patients. Now observe." Mr. Muller rapped once, they raised their hands; twice, they clasped them; three times, they rattled off the Lord's Prayer; the next moment they were shoveling their soup into their mouths in silence.

"Miss Vogdes does not approve their religious teaching, William. You see," turning to her, "how they need a real motherly care. You could give it to them."

But Kitty, who perhaps did "want stamina," and who was more of a child than any before her, made no answer. Vice and disease faced her as never before: those hundreds of hungry eyes fenced her in.

"Are you sick?" said Mr. Muller anxiously, seeing her face. "It is the smell of the soup, perhaps. Come out of this. Let me pass, Maria. You forget how foolishly tender her life has been: she never probably looked at crime before. Come out to the fresh air."

"You'd better stay," said Maria coolly, aside. "These children will plead your cause with such a girl as that better than you can do or have done, I take it. Now, my dear," putting Kitty's hand between her own, "this is my brother's work, in which he wishes you to join him. Put it to yourself whether it is not your duty. You're very young; you've dreamed a good deal, most likely: this awakening to the fact that there is work in the world besides marrying and nursing babies revolts and shocks most young girls. Yet here it is." Her voice was very gentle, and sincere in every cadence, the words true: there lay the terrible grinding power of them. "Talk over your future life with William, my dear. There is the matron. I must go and see about that charge for pepper she

made last month. Pepper for these children's stomachs, indeed!"

Mr. Muller drew Catharine's hand in his arm. "I did not mean to bring you here to-day," he said, nervously mopping his face with his handkerchief. "Maria is so fond of managing! But—but it was as my wife I wanted your help."

"My wife." Kitty was not surprised. At eighteen one reasons as the bird flies. Since she passed the six straight evergreens yonder she had learned that life was not an old book-house, a few sad and merry tunes, meals, and a bench to dream on. It was work—for Christ. Not far-off pagans, but little children with sin and disease heavy upon them, asking her to take it away.

She might want stamina or any other intellectual power, but her emotions were hot and near the surface: these children and their misery wounded and bruised her as they had never done Mr. Muller or his sister: her sense of duty and affection for her God, too, was as real and urgent with her as that of a dog for his master.

"Take me home now," she said quietly.

"But, Catharine— This is no answer. And my love for you is of such long standing!" pleaded the little man, whose mouth, being once opened by his passion, found it difficult to close. He forgot, too, the hundreds of eyes staring at him over the soup-spoons.

"Shall we go out?" said Kitty with an impatient laugh, which would not be polite. "There's too much beef here. And cabbage."

They passed Miss Muller, who nodded down on Catharine from the heights of brusque sincerity of the Woman's Rights people: "Come and see me, my dear. You and I shall get on very comfortably, I dare say;" to which Kitty replied with her old-fashioned manner, which had a fine courteous quality in it, whether it meant anything or not.

They were out in the street again. The sun was still hot and glaring. Past the new row of Morse's blue-painted shops, down the factory alley, all along the cinder path, Mr. Muller pressed and

urged his suit. She heard every word with sharp distinctness.

The children: her work for Christ. Under all was a dull consciousness that this thing had been coming on her since the day, years ago, when she had suffered conviction at a revival and been converted. All His followers must give their lives to His service. Give their lives! These were words which to the poor little girl had always been terribly real, never a hackneyed form. Now the time had come, there was a dreadful wrenching at her heart.

"Oh, God! oh, my God! I want to do what's right!" cried Kitty silently, looking away to the farthest horizon.

Mr. Muller remembered by this time some of his long-planned endearing speeches, and used them. But he could not bring a blush to her cheek. She did presently look straight at him, her eye passing quickly and critically over the neat paunchy little figure in its fashionably-cut coat and tight-fitting trousers. When she was a girl of ten she had fancied that Dr. Brownlee would be her future husband—the actual Sir Guy. She would listen Sunday after Sunday to the gray-bearded old fellow dealing the thunders of Sinai from the pulpit overhead, in a rapt delight, thinking how sweet it would be to be guided step by step by so holy and great a man. Long after she grew out of that, indeed only a year or two ago, she used to tremble and grow hot to her finger-tips when young Herr Bluhm, the music-master, went by the gate. A nod of his curly bullet head or the tramp of his sturdy cowskin boots along the road made her nerves tingle as never before. "What was this that ailed her?" she had asked herself a dozen times a day. All Mr. Muller's love-making did not move her now as one note of Bluhm's voluntaries on the organ had done. She had thought him Mendelssohn and Mozart in one: the tears came now, thinking of that divine music. But one day Mrs. Guinness had brought him in, being a phrenologist, to "feel Kitty's head." She felt the astonished indignation yet which stunned her from his thick thumb and

fore finger as they gripped and fumbled over her head as if she had been a log of wood. But what could poor Bluhm know of the delicate fancies about himself in her brain as he measured it, which his heavy paws, smelling of garlic and tobacco, were putting to flight? "Philoprogenitiveness—whew! this little girl will be fond of children, madam. Tune, time!—has no more notion of music than a frog."

"At least," thought Catharine now, "Mr. Muller is a gentleman. I shall never feel disgust for him."

They had reached the gate now. He waited. "I shall not come in. I've confused and startled you, Catharine. You want time to think," he said gently.

"I understand, oh, I quite understand. But I never thought of myself as your wife," she said quietly. "It would be better you gave me time."

"Good-bye, then, my—my darling."

"Good-bye."

She stood looking over the gate, the walnut branches dark overhead, a level ray of sunlight on her strange alluring eyes and full bosom. Mr. Muller lingered, smoothing his hat before he put it on.

"She has not at all the intellectual power of Maria," he thought. "Maria's the sort of woman I ought to have chosen, I suppose," being a reformer, first of all, in the very grain. But the silly thought of holding her hand or kissing her lips came to him at the moment, and tormented him thereafter with a feverish desire.

CHAPTER V.

CATHARINE stood a long time by the gate.

"Don't question the child," said Peter to her mother. He would not even look at her when she came in, but fidgeted about, his leathery jaws red as a girl's at the thought that Kitty loved and was beloved.

"Is supper over? I'm hungry," was all she said. They watched her furtively as she ate.

"It's prayer-meeting night, Catharine,"

said Mrs. Guinness when she was through, taking her bonnet from the closet.

"I'm not going."

"Mr. Muller will miss you, my dear."

"Mr. Muller never has enough of prayer-meetings," recklessly, "but I have. I prefer going to bed to-night;" and she went up stairs.

Before her mother was gone, however, she began to change her dress, putting on one which, when the cape was not worn, left her shoulders and arms bare. She shook down her hair after the fashion of a portrait in the book-shop of Kitty Clive, Peg Woffington or some other ancient beauty more amiable than discreet. There was a delicious flavor of wickedness in the taking out of every hairpin. Then she came down to Peter where he sat smoking.

"In the dark, father? I'll light the candles;" which she did, scolding Jane savagely between-times. "We'll have some old plays to-night, father," bringing a book which her mother had forbidden, and then bringing his sheepskin-lined chair up to the table. Peter eyed her furtively as he puffed out his cigar to the last ash. On the stage or in the ball-room he had never seen, he thought, a finer woman than Catharine; and the old man's taste in beauty or dress or wine had been keen enough when he was a young blood on the town. He was annoyed and irritable.

"Catharine," he said sharply, "bring your shawl: the night is chilly." But he read the plays with outward good-humor, and with an inward delight and gusto, which he would not betray. All his youth—that old Peter Guinness, for whom each day's bumpers had been frothed so high—came back in the familiar exits and entrances. The words were innocent enough as he altered them in reading for Kitty, though a good deal disjointed as to meaning; but she was not critical—forced herself to take an interest in his stories of Burton and Kean, and how he first saw old Jefferson.

"I suppose," moving uneasily on her stool at his feet, "that this now is 'the world, the flesh and the devil!' But,"

viciously snapping her eyes, "I like it, I like it! I wish I could think of something else to do."

In the middle of Peter's croaking of "Poor Yarico," to show her how Catalani sang it on the London boards, she jumped up and went to the window. People were coming home from prayer-meeting, husbands and wives together.

"I suppose every woman must marry, father?" she said.

Peter looked doubtfully at her over his spectacles, opened his mouth and shut it once or twice. "I judge that is the highest lot for a woman," he said slowly, "to be the wife of a good man."

"A good man? Oh yes, good enough!" and with that she flung herself down on the floor, and, putting her head on Peter's knee, cried as if her heart would break. For Kitty was never in the habit of carrying her pain off into solitary places: when she cried it must be with her head on somebody's knee.

This chapter of Catharine's history every wide-awake young woman among our readers has doubtless finished for herself: she knows the closing-in process by which society, expediency, pro-

pinquity, even moral obligations, hedge many a man and woman and drive them into marriage.

In the weeks that followed she saw but one path open to her: in it lay her work for Christ and her woman's birthright to be a wife and mother (for Kitty, ever since she was a baby nursing dolls, had meant to be both).

She spent most of her time shut up with her Bible and hymn-book, sometimes praying over them, sometimes sticking in her forefinger and opening at chance verses to try her fortune about this affair. During this time she was usually unnaturally humble and meek, but there were days when her temper was intolerable.

"Don't come complaining to me," said Peter testily to her mother. "The child's a good child enough. But when you force her to stretch her heart over three hundred vicious little imps, no wonder it breaks."

"Kitty's a free agent," she replied calmly.

Kitty was a free agent, and at the end of two weeks she accepted Mr. Muller.



PART II.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. GUINNESS up stairs in her closet gave thanks every day to Heaven for the blessed result: down stairs she nagged and scolded Kitty from morning until night. Peter supposed it was in order to maintain her authority, but it appeared there were other reasons.

"The girl disappoints me, now that one looks at her as a woman," she said to her husband at breakfast one day, while Kitty sat opposite placidly eating a liberal supply of steak and cakes. She looked up inquiringly. "Yes," vehemently, "at your age I could not have eaten a meal a week after I was engaged. Whenever I heard your father's step I was in a tremor from head to toe. You receive Mr. Muller as though you had been married for years. Not a blush! As cool as any woman of the world!"

"But I don't feel any tremor," helping her father to butter.

"It's immodest!"

Kitty blushed now, but whether from anger or shame no one could tell, for she remained silent. She laid down her knife and fork the next moment, however, and rose.

"What I fear is this," said her mother, raising her voice—"Mr. Muller's disappointment. He looks for a womanly, loving wife—"

"And I'm not one?" Poor Kitty stood in the doorway swinging her sun-bonnet. She was just then certainly not a morbid, despairing woman, who had made a terrible mistake: nothing but a scared child whom anybody would have hurried to comfort and humor. "I want to do what's right, I'm sure;" and her red under lip began to tremble and the water to gather in her eyes. She sat down to hear the rest of the lecture, but her mother stopped short. Presently, when the chickens came clucking, she went to mix their meal as usual, very pale and dolorous.

In an hour she put her head in at

the shop-window, her eyes sparkling: "There's two new chicks in the corn-bin nest, and they're full-blooded bantams, I'm sure, father."

"She's not fit to be married!" cried Mrs. Guinness excitedly. "She is both silly and unfeeling. God only knows how I came to be the mother of such a child! The great work before her she cares nothing about; and as for Mr. Muller, she doesn't value him as much as a bantam hen. It's her narrow intellect. Her brain is small, as Bluhm said."

It was his wife's conscience twitting her, Peter knew. "I would not be uneasy," he said with a cynical smile. "You can't bring love out of her by that sort of friction." But he was himself uneasy. If Catharine had been gloomy, or even thoughtful, at the prospect of her marriage, he would have cared less. But she came in that very day in glee at the sour, critical looks with which some envious young women of the church had followed her; and when her mother called her up stairs to look at a trunkful of embroidered under-clothing which she had kept for this crisis, he could hear Kitty's delighted chatter and giggle for an hour. Evidently her cup of pleasure was full for that day. Was his little girl vulgar, feeble in both heart and mind, as her mother said?

Kitty was on trial that day. Miss Muller called and swept her off to the Water-cure in the afternoon. She meant to interest her in the Reformatory school for William's sake. She began by explaining the books, and the system of keeping them. "It is my brother's wish you should keep the accounts," she said.

"Accounts! oh yes, of course."

The tone was too emphatic. Miss Muller looked up from the long lines of figures and found Kitty holding her eyes open by force. Evidently she had just had a comfortable nap.

Whereupon Maria began to patiently

dilate on the individual cases of the boys to be reformed; and terrible instances they were of guilt and misery.

"She whimpered a little," she said afterward to her brother. "I'll do her justice: she did, a little. But they ought to have brought tears from a log; and the next minute, seeing those wonderful eyes of hers fixed on me with a peculiar thoughtfulness, I asked her what was she thinking of, and found she was studying 'how I did that lovely French twist in my back hair.' No. There's nothing in her—nothing. Not an idea; but that I did not expect. But not even a feeling or principle to take hold of. Take my word, William. You are going to marry fine eyes and pink cheeks. Nothing more."

Mr. Muller cared for nothing more. If there had been an answering hint of fire in eyes or cheeks to the rush of emotion he felt at the sight of them, he would have been content. But Catharine's face was very like a doll's just now—the eyes as bright and unmeaning, the pink as unchanging. In vain he brought her flowers; in vain, grown wiser by love, led her out in the moonlight to walk, or, flushed and quaking himself, read in a shrill, uncertain voice absurd fond little sonnets he had composed to her. Kitty was always attentive, polite and indifferent. She never went to her old seat during the whole summer, never opened one of the old books over which she and Peter used to pore. He showed her a new edition of the *Pilgrim's Progress* one day, with illustrations: "See what Bell and Daldy have done for our old friend, Catharine."

"This allegory all seems much ado about nothing," she said presently, flipping over the leaves. "Really, I can't see that there is any wilderness in the world, or devils to fight in or out of pits. At least for me."

Speculations on life from Kitty! A month ago she would have gone no farther than the pictures. "There's nothing worse for me than nice dresses and a wedding, and three hundred children to bring up for the Lord, with a smell of beef-and-cabbage over it all. Good

gracious! Don't you know I'm joking, father?" seeing his face. She laughed and hugged him, and hugged him again. "As for the children, I love them of course, poor little wretches!"

Peter scowled over her back as she hung on him. Was it sheer silliness? Or had certain doors in her nature never been opened, even enough for her to know all that lay behind them? He pushed her off, holding her by both wrists: "Are you quite willing to marry Mr. Muller? Do you love him? Think what it is to marry without love. For God's sake tell me, Catharine!"

"Yes, I love him. Certainly. Why," kindling into animation, "I've worn his ring for a month. Haven't you seen it?" turning her hand about and looking at the blue turquoise against the white dimples with a delighted chuckle.

There was a storm that evening: the thunder was deafening; the rain dashed heavily against the little square windows of the Book-house. Catharine was alone. As soon as she made sure of that, Peter having gone to the city and her mother to a meeting, she put on her waterproof cloak and overshoes, and sallied out. Not by any means as heroines do who rush out into the tempest to assuage fiercer storms of rage or despair within. But there was something at this time in Kitty's blood which, though it would not warm her cheeks at Mr. Muller's approach, was on fire for adventure. To go out alone in the rain was to the chicken-hearted little simpleton what a whaling-voyage would be to a runaway boy. She came in after an hour drenched to the skin, went up stairs to change her clothes, and ran down presently to cuddle before the fire. Now was the time to think rationally, she thought, her elbow on a chair, her chin pillowed in her soft palm. Here was her marriage just at hand. She had looked forward to marriage all her life. Five minutes she gave to the long-vexed question of whether her wedding-veil should cover her face or not. "It would shade my nose, and in frosty weather my nose always will be red." What queer little hooked noses the Mullers all had! and

that reflection swung her mind round to her lover and his love-making, where it rested, until suddenly the fire grew a hazy red blotch and her head began to bob.

"I did not use to be so thick-headed," rousing herself, and staring sleepily at the rain-washed window and the crackling fire. She sang a little hymn to herself, that simplest of all old ditties:

I think, when I hear that sweet story of old.

It made her tender and tearful, and brought her feet close to her Saviour, as those other children upon whose head He laid his hands. "I ought to be thankful that I have work for Him," she thought. "How I envied Mary McKean when she sailed to India as a missionary! And here are the heathen ready-made for me," proceeding very earnestly to think over the state of the wretched three hundred. But her head began to nod again, and the fire was suddenly dashed out in blackness. She started up yawning. It was all so dreary! Life—Then and there our wholesome Kitty would have made her first step toward becoming the yearning, misplaced Woman of the Time, but for a knock which came at the door.

There had been an occasional roll of thunder, and the rain beat steadily upon the roof. The first knock failed to rouse her. At the second a man burst in, and stopped as suddenly in the dark end of the shop, shading his eyes from the glare: then he came tiptoeing forward. Even in this abrupt breaking in out of the storm there was something apologetic and deprecating about the man. As he came up, still sheltering his eyes, as though from the surprise of Kitty's loveliness, and not the fire, he had the bearing of a modest actor called before the curtain for bouquets.

"I had not expected—*this*," with a stage wave of the hand toward Catharine.

Now Kitty's pink ears, as we know, were always pricked for a compliment, and her politeness was apt to carry her over the verge of lying; but she was hardly civil now: she drew coldly back, wishing with all her heart that her lover,

fat, simple, pure-minded little Muller, were here to protect her. Yet Mrs. Guinness, no doubt, would have said this man was made of finer clay than the clergyman. Both figure and face were small and delicate: his dress was finical and dainty, from the fur-topped overshoes to the antique seal and the trimming of his gray moustache. He drew off his gloves, holding a white, wrinkled hand to the fire, but Catharine felt the colorless eyes passing over her again and again.

"Your business," she said, "is probably with my father?"

"Your father is Peter Guinness? No. My business hardly deserves the name, in fact," leisurely stopping to smooth and fold the yellow gloves between his palms, in order to prolong his sentences. "It was merely to leave a message for his son, for Hugh Guinness."

"Hugh Guinness is dead."

"Dead!" For an instant the patting of the gloves ceased, and he looked at her steadily; then, with a nod of comprehension, he went on: "Oh, it is not convenient for Hugh to be alive just now? We are old comrades, you see: I know his ways. I know he was in Delaware a year ago. But I have no time now to go to Delaware. The message will no doubt reach him if left with you." He had made the gloves into a square package by this time, and, flattening it with a neat pat or two, put it in his pocket, turning to her with a significant smile.

"Hugh Guinness is dead," said Catharine. "He died in Nicaragua five years ago. Your business with him ended then."

"And yet—" coming a step nearer, "yet if Guinness were in his grave now, I fancy he would think my business of more importance to him than life itself would be." He was talking against time, she saw—talking while he inspected her to see whether she were willfully lying or believed what she said. He was a man who by rule believed the worst: the disagreeable, incredulous smile came back. "These are the days when ghosts walk, as you know." After

a moment's pause: "And Hugh may come to rap and write with the rest. So, even admitting that he is dead, it would be safer for you to receive the message. It matters much to him."

"What is it?" she said curiously. "There is no use in wasting so many words about the matter."

"Tell him—" lowering his voice. "No," with a sudden suspicious glance at her. "No need of wasting words, true enough. Give him this. There's an address inside. Tell him the person who sent it waits for him there." He took out of his pocket a small morocco case, apparently containing a photograph, and laid it down on the table.

"Take it back. Hugh Guinness has been dead for years. I will not take charge of it."

"No, he's not dead," coolly buttoning his coat again. "I suppose you believe what you say. But he was in Delaware, I tell you, last October. If he asks about me, tell him I only acted as a messenger in the matter. I've no objection to doing him that good turn."

He nodded familiarly, put on his hat, and went out as suddenly as he had come. When he was gone she heard the rain drenching the walnuts outside, dripping, dripping; the thunder rolled down the valley; the fire crackled and flashed. There, on the table, in the dirty morocco case, lay a Mystery, a tremendous Life-secret, no doubt, of which she, Kitty, held the clue. It was like Pepita when she found the little gold key that unlocked the enchanted rooms. Hugh Guinness living? To be restored to his father? She was in a fever of delight and excitement. When she opened the case she found a beautiful woman's face—a blonde who seemed sixteen to Kitty, but who might be sixty. The Mystery enlarged: it quite filled Kitty's horizon. When she put the case in her pocket, and sat down, with red cheeks and bright eyes, on the rug again, I am sure she did not remember there was a Reform school or a Muller in the world.

At last Peter was heard in the porch, stamping and shaking: "Oh, I'm dry

as a toast, Jane, what with the oil-skin and leggings. Yes, take them. Miss Vogdes wants tea in the shop, eh? All right! Why child," turning up her face, "your cheeks burn like a coal. Mr. Muller been here?"

"Oh dear, no!" pushing him into a chair. "Is there nothing to think of but Mullers and marrying?"

She poured out the tea, made room for the plates of cold chicken and toast among the books, and turned the supper into a picnic, as she had done hundreds of times, gossiping steadily all the while. But Mr. Guinness saw that there was something coming.

When the tea was gone she sat down on the wooden bench beside him, leaning forward on his knee: "Father, you promised once to show me before I went away all that you had belonging to—your other child."

Guinness did not speak at once, but sat smoking his cigar. It went out in his mouth. He made a motion to rise once or twice, and sat down again.

"To-night, Kitty?"

"Yes, to-night. We are alone."

He got up at last slowly, going to a drawer in the oak cases which she had never seen opened. Unlocking it, he took out one or two Latin school-books, a broken fishing-rod, a gun and an old cap, and placed them before her. It was a hard task she had set him, she saw. He lifted the cap and pointed to a long red hair which had caught in the button, but did not touch it: "Do you see that? That is Hugh's. I found it there long after he was gone. It had caught there some day when the boy jerked the cap off. He was a careless dog! Always jerking and tearing!"

Catharine was silent until he began putting the things back in the drawer: "Father, there's no chance, is there? You could not be mistaken in that report from Nicaragua? You never thought it possible that your son might yet be alive?"

"Hugh's dead—dead," quietly. But his fingers lingered over the book and gun, as though he had been smoothing the grave-clothes about his boy.

"The proof was complete, then?" ventured Kitty.

He turned on her: "Why do you talk to me of Hugh, Catharine? I can tell you nothing of him. He's dead: isn't that enough? Christian folks would say he was a man for whom his friends ought to think death a safe ending. They have told me so more than once. But he was not altogether bad, to my mind." He bent over the drawer now. Kitty saw that he took hold of the red hair, and drew it slowly through his fingers: his face had grown in these few minutes aged and haggard.

"Behold, how he loved him!" she thought. He had been the old man's only son. Other men could make mourning for their dead children, talk of them all their lives; but she knew her mother would not allow Peter to even utter his boy's name.

"I'm sure," she said vehemently from where she stood by the fire, "he was not a bad man. I remember Hugh very well, and I remember nothing that was not lovable and good about him;" the truth of which was that she had a vague recollection of a freckle-faced boy, who had tormented her and her kittens day and night, and who had suddenly disappeared out of her life. But she meant to comfort her father, and she did it.

"You've a good, warm heart, Kitty. I did not know that anybody but me remembered the lad."

She snuggled down on the floor beside him, drawing his hand over her hair. Usually there is great comfort in the very touch of a woman like Kitty. But Peter's hand rested passively on her head: her cooing and patting could not touch his trouble to-day.

"Your mother will need you, my dear," he said at last, as soon as that lady's soft steady step was heard in the hall. Kitty understood and left him alone.

"Mother," she said, coming into the chamber where Mrs. Guinness, her pink cheeks pinker from the rain, lay back in her easy-chair, her slippered feet on the fender—"mother, there is a question I wish to ask you."

"Well, Catharine?"

"When did Hugh die? How do you know that he is dead?"

Mrs. Guinness sat erect and looked at her in absolute silence. Astonishment and anger Kitty had expected from her at her mention of the name, but there was a certain terror in her face which was unaccountable.

"What do you know of Hugh Guinness? I never wished that his name should cross your lips, Catharine."

"I know very little. But I have a reason for wishing to know when and how he died. It is for father's sake," she added, startled at the increasing agitation which her mother could not conceal.

Still, Mrs. Guinness did not reply. She was not a superstitious woman: she felt no remorse about her treatment of her stepson. There had been evil tongues, even in the church, to lay his ruined life at her door, and to say that bigotry and sternness had driven him to debauchery and a drunkard's death. She knew she had done her duty: she liked best to think of herself as a mother in Israel. Yet there had always been a dull, mysterious terror which linked Hugh Guinness and Catharine together. It was there he would revenge himself. Some day he would put out his dead hand from the grave to work the child's destruction. She had reasoned and laughed at her own folly in the matter for years. But the belief was there. Now it was taking shape.

She would meet it face to face. She stood up as though she had been going to throttle some visible foe for ever: "I shall tell you the truth, Catharine: Your father has never known it. He believes his son died in Nicaragua fighting for a cause which he thought good. I let him believe it. There was some comfort in that."

"It was not true, then?"

"No." She rearranged the vases on the mantel-shelf, turned over the illuminated texts hanging on the wall, until she came to the one for the day. She was trying to convince herself that Hugh Guinness mattered nothing to her.

"He died," she said at last, "in New York, a reprobate, as he lived."

"But where? how?"

"What can that matter to you?" sharply. "But I will tell you where and how. Two winters ago a poor, bloated, penniless wretch took up his lodging in a cheap hotel in New York. He left it only to visit the gambling-houses near. An old friend of mine recognized Hugh, and warned me of his whereabouts. I went up to the city at once, but when I reached it he had disappeared. He had lost his last penny at dice."

"Then he is still alive?"

"God forbid! No," correcting herself. "A week later the body of a suicide was recovered off Coney Island and placed in the Morgue. It was horribly mutilated. But I knew Hugh Guinness. I think I see him yet, lying on that marble slab and his eyes staring up at me. It was no doing of mine that he lay there."

"No, mother, I am sure that it was not," gently. "If your conscience reproaches you, I wish he were here that you could try and bring him into the right path at last."

"My conscience does not trouble me. As for Hugh—Heaven forbid that I should judge any man!—but if ever there was a son of wrath predestined to perdition, it was he. I always felt his day of grace must have passed while he was still a child."

Kitty had no answer to this. She went off to bed speedily, and to sleep. An hour or two later her mother crept softly to her bedside and stood looking at her. The woman had been crying.

"Lord, not on her, not on her!" she cried silently. "Let not my sin be laid up against her!" But her grief was short-lived. Hugh was dead. As for his harming Kitty, that was all folly. Meanwhile, Mr. Muller and the wedding-clothes were facts. She stooped over Kitty and kissed her—turned down the sheet to look at her soft blue-veined shoulder and moist white foot. Such a little while since she was a baby asleep in this very bed! Some of the baby lines were in her face still. It was hard to believe that now she was a woman—to be in a few days a wife.

She covered her gently, and stole

away nodding and smiling. The ghost was laid.

As for Kitty, she had gone to bed not at all convinced that Hugh Guinness was dead. It was a more absorbing Mystery, that was all. But it did not keep her awake. She did not spin any romantic fancies about him or his dark history. If he were alive, he was very likely as disagreeable and freckle-faced a man as he had been a boy. But the secret was her own—a discovery; a very different affair from this marriage, which had been made and fitted on her by outsiders.

CHAPTER VII.

"GONE! You don't mean that your mother and Mr. Guinness have gone to leave you for a month!" Mr. Muller was quite vehement with annoyance and surprise.

"At least a month," said Catharine calmly. "Mrs. Guinness always goes with my father on his summer journey for books, and this year she has—well, things to buy for me."

It was the wedding-dress she meant, he knew. He leaned eagerly in at the window, where he stood hoping for a blush. But none came. "Purl two and knit one," said Kitty to her crochet.

"I certainly do not consider it safe or proper for you to be left alone," he blustered mildly after a while.

"There is Jane," glancing back at the black figure waddling from the kitchen to the pump.

"Jane! I shall send Maria up to stay with you, Catharine."

"You are very kind! It is so pleasant to be cared for!" with a little gush of politeness and enthusiasm. "But dear Maria finds the house damp. I will not be selfish. You must allow me to be alone."

He looked at her furtively. Was there, after all, an obstinate, unbendable back-bone under the soft feathers of this his nestling dove? He was discomfited at every turn this evening. He had hoped that Kitty would notice that his

little imperial had been retrimmed; and he had bought a set of sleeve-buttons, antique coins, at a ruinous price, in hopes they would please her. She looked at neither the one nor the other. Yet she had a keen eye for dress—too keen an eye, indeed. Only last night she had spent an hour anxiously cutting old Peter's hair and beard, and Mr. Muller could not but remember that he was a handsome young fellow, and do what she would with Peter, he was old and beaked like a parrot. "Besides, he is only her stepfather," he reasoned, "and I am to be her husband: she loves me."

Did she love him? The question always brought a pain under his plump chest and neat waistcoat which he could not explain; he thrust it hastily away. But he loitered about the room, thinking how sweet it would be if this childish creature would praise or find fault with buttons or whiskers in her childish way. Kitty, however, crocheted on calmly, and saw neither. The sun was near its setting. The clover-fields stretched out dry and brown in its warm light, to where the melancholy shadows gathered about the wooded creeks.

Mr. Muller looked wistfully out of the window, and then at her. "Suppose you come and walk with me?" he said presently.

Kitty glanced out, and settled herself more comfortably in her rocking-chair. "It is very pleasant here," smiling.

He thought he would go home: in fact, he did not know what else to do. The room was very quiet, they were quite alone. The evening light fell on Catharine; her hands had fallen on her lap; she was thinking so intently of her Mystery that she had forgotten he was there. How white her bent neck was, with the rings of brown hair lying on it! There was a deeper pink than usual on her face, too, as though her thoughts were pleasant. He came closer, bent over her chair, touched her hair with one chubby finger, and started back red and breathless.

"Did you speak?" said Kitty, looking up.

"I'm going home. I only wanted to say good-bye."

"So soon? Good-bye. I shall see you to-morrow, I suppose?" taking up her work.

"Yes. Kitty—"

"Well?"

"I have never bidden you good-bye except by shaking hands. Could I kiss you? I have thought about that every day since you promised to marry me."

The pleasant rose-tinge was gone now: even the soft lips, which were dangerously close, were colorless: "You can kiss me if you want to. I suppose it's right."

The little man drew back gravely. "Never mind: it's no matter. I had made up my mind never to ask for it until you seemed to be able to give me real wifely love."

She started up. "I can do no more than I have done," vehemently. "And I'm tired of hearing of myself as a wife. I'd as soon consider myself as a grandmother."

Mr. Muller waited a moment, too shocked and indignant to speak: then he took up his hat and went to the door. "Good-night, my child," he said kindly. "To-morrow you will be your better self."

Kitty knew nothing of better selves: she only felt keenly that two months ago such rudeness would have been impossible to her. Why was she growing vulgar and weak?

The air stirred the leaves of the old walnuts outside: the black-coated, dapper figure had not yet passed from under them. He was so gentle and pious and good! Should she run after him? She dropped instead into her chair and grieved comfortably till a noise in the shop stopped her, and looking through the dusky books she saw a man waiting. She got up and went in hastily, looking keenly at his face to find how long he had been there, and how much he had seen. It wore, however, an inscrutable gravity.

Most of Peter's old customers sold to themselves during his absence, but this

was a stranger. He stood looking curiously at the heaped books and the worn sheepskin-covered chair, until she was close to him: then he looked curiously at her.

"I have had some correspondence with Mr. Guinness about a copy of Quadd's *Scientific Catalogues*."

"Mr. Guinness is not at home, but he left the book," said Kitty, alertly climbing the steps. Bringing the book, she recognized him as Doctor McCall, who had once before been at the shop when her father was gone. He was a young man, largely built, with a frank, attentive face, red hair and beard, and cordial voice. It was Kitty's nature to meet anybody halfway who carried summer weather about him. "My father hoped you would not come for the book until his return," she said civilly. "Your letters made him wish to see you. You were familiar, he told me, with some old pamphlets of which few customers know anything."

"Probably. I could not come at any other time," curtly, engrossed in turning over the pages of his book. Presently he said, "I will look over the stock if you will allow me. But I need not detain you," glancing at her work in the inner room. Kitty felt herself politely dismissed. Nor, although Doctor McCall stayed for half an hour examining Peter's favorite volumes as he sat on his high office-stool and leaned on his desk, did he once turn his eyes on the dimpling face making a picturesque vignette in the frame of the open window. When he had finished he came to the door. "I will call for the books I have chosen in an hour," and then bowed distantly and was gone.

He had scarcely closed the gate when the back door creaked, and Miss Muller came in smiling, magnetic from head to foot, as her disciples in Berrytown were used to allege.

"And what is our little dove afraid of in her nest?" pinching Kitty's cheek as though she had been a dove very lately fledged indeed. She had always in fact the feeling when with Kitty that through her she suffered to live and patted on

the back the whole ignoble, effete race of domestic women. Catharine caught sight of her satchel, which portended a visit of several days.

"Pray give me your hat and stay, with me for tea," she said sweetly.

Miss Muller saw through her stratagem and laughed: "Now, that is just the kind of finesse in which such women delight!" she thought good-humoredly, going into the shop to lay off her hat and cape. The next moment she returned. Her face was bloodless. The muscles of the chin twitched.

"Who has been here?" she cried, sitting down and rubbing her hands violently on her wrists. "Oh, Catharine, who has been here?"

Now Kitty, a hearty eater with a slow brain, and nerves laid quite out of reach under the thick healthy flesh, knew nothing of the hysterical clairvoyant moods and trances familiar to so many lean, bilious American women. She ran for camphor, carbonate of soda and arnica, bathed Miss Muller's head, bent over her, fussing, terrified, anxious.

"Is it a pain? Is it in your stomach? Did you eat anything that disagreed with you?" she cried.

"Eat! I believe in my soul you think of nothing but eating!" trying resolutely to still the trembling of her limbs and chattering of her teeth. "I was only conscious of a presence when I entered that room. Some one who long ago passed out of my life, stood by me again." The tears ran weakly over her white cheeks.

"Somebody in the shop!" Kitty went to it on tiptoe, quaking at the thought of burglars. "There's nobody in the shop. Not even the cat," turning back reassured. "How did you feel the Presence, Maria? See it, or hear it, or smell it?"

"There are other senses than those, you know," pacing slowly up and down the room with the action of the leading lady in a melodrama; but her pain or vision, whatever it was, had been real enough. The cold drops stood on her forehead, her lips quivered, the brown eyes turned from side to side asking for

help. "When *he* is near shall I not know it?" she said with dry lips.

Kitty stole up to her and touched her hand. "I'm so glad if you are in love!" she whispered. "I thought you would think it foolish to care for love or—or babies. I used to care for them both a great deal."

"Pshaw! Now listen to me, child," her step growing steadier. "Oh dear! Haven't you any belladonna? Or coffee? That would set me right at once. As for a husband and children, they are obstructions to a woman—nothing more. If my head was clear I could make you understand. I am a free soul. I have my work to do. Marriage is an accident: so is child-bearing. In nine cases out of ten they hinder a woman's work. But when I meet a kindred soul, higher, purer than mine, I give allegiance to it. My feeling becomes a part of my actual life: it is a spiritual action: it hears and sees by spiritual senses. And then—Ah, there is something terrible in being alone—*alone!*" She called this out loudly, wringing her hands. Kitty gave a queer smile. It was incredible to her that a woman could thus dissect herself for the benefit of another.

"But she's talking for her own benefit," watching her shrewdly. "If there's any acting about it, she's playing Ophelia and Hamlet and the audience all at once.—Was it Doctor McCall you fancied was in the shop?" she asked quietly.

Miss Muller turned, a natural blush

dyeing her face and neck: "He has been here then?— Oh, there! there he is!" as the young man came in at the gate. She passed her hands over her front hair nervously, shook down her lace sleeves and went out to meet him. Kitty saw his start of surprise. He stooped, for she was a little woman, and held out both his hands.

"Yes, John, it is I!" she said with a half sob.

"Are you really so glad to see me again, Maria?" She caught his arm for her sole answer, and walked on, nestling close to his side.

"It may be spiritual affinity, but it looks very like love," thought Kitty. It was a different love from any she had known. They turned and walked through the gate down into the shadow of the wooded creeks, the broad strong figure leaning over the weaker one. Kitty fancied the passion in his eyes, the words he would speak. She thought how she had noticed at first sight that there was unusual strength and tenderness in the man's face.

"There will be no talk there of new dresses or reformatory schools, I'm sure of that," she said, preparing to go to bed. She felt somehow wronged and slighted to-night, and wished for old Peter's knee to rest on. She had no friend like old Peter, and never would have.



PART III.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT rained during the night. The wind blew feebly in the morning, and the sunlight glimmered dully from behind the flying gray clouds. Catharine looked out of her window, anxiously pushing aside the boughs full of wet white roses. The sense of desolation was not strong enough upon her to make her forget that Peter had not yet cut the clover in the lower meadow, and that such a rain was bad for the tomatoes. Doctor McCall was at the gate, propping up an old Bourbon rose, an especial favorite of her father's. Somebody tapped at her door, and Miss Muller rustled in in a flounced white muslin and rose-colored ribbons. She too hurried to the window and looked down.

"I asked him to meet me here, Kitty. I can't make you understand, probably, but the Water-cure House is so bald and bare! There is something in the shade here, and the old books, and this wilderness of roses, that forms a fitting background for a friendship like ours, aesthetically considered."

"I'm very glad. It's lucky I told Jane to have waffles—"

"I'll go down," interrupted Miss Muller, "and direct her about the table. Coarse tablecloths and oily butter would jar against the finest emotions. What very pretty shoulders you have, child! Such women as you, like potatoes, are best *au naturel*. Now, with those corsets, and this red shawl over the back of your chair, you would make a very good Madonna of the Rubens school. Men's ideal of womanhood then was to be plump, insipid and a mother."

"But about the oily butter?" said Kitty, glancing back over the aforesaid shoulders as she stooped to lace her shoes, while Maria hurried off to the kitchen. "Jane will jar against her finer emotions, I fancy, when she begins to order her about."

But Kitty lost all relish for fun before

she sat down to the breakfast-table. Mr. Muller came in. The poor little man hurried to her side: "I passed a sleepless night, Catharine. I feared that I had been rough with you. I forget so often how gentle and tender you are, my darling."

Catharine was puzzled: "Upon my word, I've forgotten what happened. And I really never feel especially gentle or tender. You are mistaken about that."

When she took her place behind the urn, Maria motioned her brother to the foot of the table, and then nodded significantly. "Now you two can imagine a month or two has passed," she said.

Even Doctor McCall smiled meaningly. Mr. Muller blushed, and glanced shyly at Catharine. But she looked at him unmoved. "Our table will not be like this," gravely. "You forget the three hundred blue-coats between." Maria laughed, but Doctor McCall for the first time looked steadily at the girl.

First of all, perhaps, Kitty was just then a housekeeper. She waited anxiously to see if the steak was properly rare and the omelette light, nodded brightly to Jane, who stood watchful behind her, and then looked over at her betrothed, thinking how soon they would sit down, tête-à-tête for the rest of their lives, perhaps for eternity, for, according to her orthodoxy, there could be no new loves in heaven. How fat he was, and bald! The mild blue eyes behind their glasses took possession of her and held her.

She listened to the talk between Doctor McCall and Miss Muller in a language she had never learned. Maria's share of it was largely made up of headlong dives into Spencer and Darwin, with reminiscences of *The Dial*, while Doctor McCall's was anchored fast down to facts; but it was all alive, suggestive, brilliant. They were young. They were drinking life and love with full cups.

She (looking over at the bald head and spectacled eyes) had gone straight out of childhood into middle age and respectability.

The breakfast was over at last. Miss Muller followed Doctor McCall into the shop, where he fell to turning over the old books, and then to the garden. What was the use of a stage properly set if the drama would not begin?

"Pray do not worry any longer with that old bush," as he went back to Peter's rose. "It is not a trait of yours to be persistent about trifles. Or stay: give me a bud for my hair."

"Not these!" sharply, holding her hand. "I could not see one of these roses on any woman's head."

She smiled, very well pleased: "You perceive some subtle connection between me and the flower?"

"Nothing of the sort. There are some, planted, I suppose, by that little girl, which will be more becoming to your face."

"You are repelled by the little girl," I see, John. I always told you your instincts were magnetic. That type of woman is antipathetic to you."

He laughed: "I have no instincts, hardly ideas, about either roses or types of women. If I avoided Miss Vogdes, it was because her name recalled one of the old hard experiences of my boyhood. The girl herself is harmless enough, no doubt."

"And the rose?"

"The rose? Why, we have no time to waste in such talk as this. You have not yet told me how you managed to get your profession. When I last saw you you had set all the old professors in the university at defiance. Did you carry lectures and clinics by strategy or assault? You have good fighting qualities, Maria."

She would rather not have gone over her battle with the doctors just then: she would rather he had talked of her "magnetic instincts," her hair, her eyes—anything else than her fighting qualities. But she told him. There was an inexplicable delight to her in telling him anything—even the time of day. Was

he not a pioneer, a captain among men, a seer in the realms of thought, keeping step with her all her high imaginings? Ordinary people, it is true, set McCall down as an ordinary fellow, genial and hearty—not a very skillful physician, perhaps, but a shrewd farmer, and the best judge of mules or peaches in Kent county. Maria, however, saw him with the soul's eye.

Kitty meanwhile sat by the window mending the clothes that had come out of the wash. Mr. Muller was reading some letters relative to the school to her. This was the day of the week on which she always mended the clothes, and Mr. Muller had fallen into the habit of reading to her while she did so. But to-day the Reformatory rose before her a prison, the gates of which were about to close on her. The heap of stockings, the touch of the darning cotton, the sound of Mr. Muller's droning voice, were maddening to her: every moment she made a tangle in her thread, looking down at Maria under the Bourbon rose, and the attentive face bent over her. Where should she go? What should she do? Had the world nothing in it for her but this? Yesterday she had made up her mind to go to Delaware to find Hugh Guinness, alive or dead, and bring him to his father. That would be work worth doing. This morning she remembered that Delaware was a wide hunting-ground—that she had never been ten miles from home in her life. If there were anybody to give her advice! This Doctor McCall had seemed to her to-day as, in fact, he did to most people, practical, honest, full of information. He would too, she somehow felt, understand her wild fancy. But—

"Why should Doctor McCall dislike me?" she broke in at the close of one of Mr. Muller's expositions.

"What an absurd fancy, child!" looking up in amazement. "The man was civil enough to you for so slight an acquaintance."

"It was more than dislike," vehemently. "He watched me all through breakfast as though he owed me a grudge. I could see it in his eyes."

"You oughtn't to see any eyes but mine, Cathie dear," with anxious playfulness. "Why should you care for the opinion of any man?"

"Because he is different from any man I ever knew. He belongs to the world outside. I always did wonder if people would like me out there," said Kitty, too doggedly in earnest to see how her words hurt her listener. "If one could be like those two people yonder! They seem to know everything—they can do everything!"

"Maria is well enough—for a woman," dryly. "But I never heard McCall credited with exceptional ability of any sort."

Kitty glanced at him: "Of course you're right," quickly. "Men only can judge of character: we women are apt to be silly about such things." Her kind heart felt a wrench at having hurt this good soul. She put her fingers on his fat hand with a touch that was almost a caress. He turned red with surprise and pleasure. "But it is pleasant," she said, glancing down again to the Bourbon rose, "to see such love as that. They will be married soon, I suppose?"

"Very likely. I never knew of any love in the case before. But Maria is such a manager! And you think of love, then, sometimes?" timidly putting his arm about her.

"Oh to be sure! How can you doubt that? But it grows chilly. I must bring a sacque," hurrying away; and in fact she looked cold, and shivered.

CHAPTER IX.

"DOCTOR MCCALL recognizes the Book-house, just as I did, as the right background for communion like ours," Miss Muller said complacently to Kitty a week later. "He meets me here every day."

"Yes," said Catharine with a perplexed look. She had no special instincts or intuitions, but her eyes were as keen and observant as a lynx's. He came, she saw, to the Book-house every day. But had he no other purpose than to meet Maria?

"I did not know that McCall affected scholarship," said Mr. Muller tartly the next day. "He tells me that he has a peach-farm to manage. August is no time to loiter away, poring over old books. Just the peach season."

"No," Kitty replied demurely. But her face wore again the puzzled look. She began to watch Doctor McCall. He really knew but little, she saw, of rare books: his reading of them was a mere pretence. He was neither a lazy nor a morbid man: what pleasure could he have in neglecting his work day after day, sitting alone in the dusky old shop as if held there by some enchantment? Kitty knew that she herself had nothing to do with it: she appeared to be no more in his way than a tame dog would be, and, after the first annoyance which she gave him, was really little more noticed. But there is a certain sense of home-snugness and comfort in the presence of tame dogs and of women like Kitty: one cannot be long in the room with either without throwing them a kind word or petting them in some way. Doctor McCall was just the man to fall into such a habit. Down on the farm, his cattle, his hands, even the neighbors with whom he argued on politics, could all have testified to his easy, large good-humor.

"Oh, we are the best of friends," he said indifferently when Maria found Kitty chattering to him once, very much as she did to old Peter. But when Miss Muller, who had no petty jealousies, enlarged on the singular beauty of her eyes and some good points in her shape, he did not respond. "I never could talk of a woman as if she were a horse," he said. "And this little girl seems to me unusually human."

"There's really nothing in her, though. Poor William! He is marrying eyes, I tell him. It's a pitiable marriage!"

"Yes, it is," said Doctor McCall gravely.

After that he neglected the old books sometimes to talk to Kitty. He thought she was such an immature, thoughtless creature that she would not notice that the subject he chose was always the

same—her daily life, with old Peter for her chum and confidant.

"Mr. Guinness, then, has had no companion but you?" he said one day, after a searching inspection of her face.

"No, nobody but me," quite forgetful, as she and Peter were too apt to be, that her mother was alive.

"And has had none for years?"

"Not since his son died. Hugh Guinness is dead, you know."

Doctor McCall was looking thoughtfully at the floor. He rose presently and took up his hat: "The old man cannot have been unhappy with such love as you could give him. No man could."

Kitty was sitting, as usual, on a low stool pasting labels on some dog-eared books: as long as McCall stood looking at her round cheeks and double chin she pasted on, apparently unconscious that he was there, but when he turned away she watched him shrewdly as he went uneasily up and down the shop, and finally, with a curt good-bye, turned out of the door. As the stout figure passed through the low branches of the walnuts her gray eyes began to shine. Her Mystery was nearly solved.

Dropping paste and books in a heap, she ran after him, taking a short cut through the currant bushes, so that when he passed on the outer side of the garden fence there she was quietly waiting, her head and face darkly framed by a thick creeper.

"Well?" smiling down, amused, as he might to a playful kitten.

"Doctor McCall," in the queer formal fashion that was Kitty's own, "I should be glad if you would come back this evening. Without Maria. I have some business—that is, a plan of mine. Well, it is a certain thing that—"

"That you wish to consult me about?" after waiting for her to finish.

"Yes, that's it," nodding energetically.

"Very well." He stood looking at her arm on the fence, and the face resting with its chin upon it. McCall, of all men, hated a scene, and he had an uneasy consciousness that he had just betrayed unexplained feeling in the house, and was therefore glad to slip back to

commonplaces. Besides, Kitty was exactly the kind of woman whom all men feel an insane desire to help at first sight. "You have a plan, eh? and you want advice, not knowing much about business?"

There was not the least necessity for him to say this, having asked it before. But he did it, and waited to hear Kitty say yes again, and waited still, before he lifted his hat and said good-bye, to see the shadow of a waving branch creep over her white chin and lose itself in her neck. Most men would have done the same, just as they would stop to whistle a laugh from a fat, pretty baby on the street, and then go on, leaving it behind. The last thing in the world to consult on their business, or to ask for help or comfort when trouble met them, or death.

Miss Muller spent the whole day at the Book-house, but Doctor McCall did not come, as she expected. As evening approached she began to shiver, and had premonitory symptoms of clairvoyance, and went home at last, to Kitty's relief. A slow drizzling rain set in: the damp fogs that belong to that river-bottom walled in the house and hung flat over the walnuts like a roof. Catharine had made her own corner of the Book-shop snug and cheerful. The space was wide, the light soft and bright. She placed her own chair by the table, Peter's not far from it. She meant to produce a great effect on this man to-night, to change the whole current of his life, without having the help of either love or even friendship. Unconsciously she planned to bring him close to her, though very likely she had never heard of personal magnetism, or any of the curious secrets political speakers or actors or revivalists could have told her of the deadening effects of distance and empty benches.

Then Kitty, in her room overhead, looked at herself in the glass, arrayed in a soft cashmere, in color blue, still farther toned down, by certain softer fringes and loops, into the very ideal garb for a man's type of "yielding, love-

ly woman." It was one of the sacred wedding-dresses.

"Maria could never look like this," tying a lace handkerchief about her neck, pulling the soft rings of hair looser about her ears, setting her head on one side, and half shutting her eyes to see the thick and curly lashes.

There was no danger of interruption. Maria was safely lodged in the Water-cure House, and the very idea of Mr. Muller's glossy black shoes and dainty brown umbrella venturing out in the rain made Kitty laugh.

"The dear, good soul is finical as a cat," with the good-natured indulgence of a mother for a child. Suddenly she stopped, stared at herself in the glass. "Why, he is my husband!" she said, speaking to the blushing, blue-robed figure as to another person. Then she hastily unbuttoned, unlooped the pretty dress, threw it off, putting on her usual gray wrapper and knotting her hair more tightly back than ever in a comb. "He has been very good to me—very good to me," her chin trembling a good deal.

Then she went down to meet Doctor McCall, who that moment came into the Book-shop, stopping at the door to take off and shake his oilskin coat.

"It is a wet night," she said, just as though he were a stranger. She did not know what else to say or what he answered as she went about, trimming the lamp, dragging out a chair for him, closing the window curtains. Both McCall and Catharine were ordinary people, accustomed to keep up a good flow of talk on ordinary subjects, the weather or any joke or gossip that was nearest to them. There had been no passages of love or hate between them to account for her forced formality, her trembling and flushing, and urgent almost angry wish to remind him that she was Mr. Muller's affianced wife. She felt this with a new contempt for herself.

As for Doctor McCall, he leaned comfortably back in his arm-chair and dried his legs at the grate filled with red-hot coals, while he listened to the soft rustle of her skirts as she moved noiselessly about him. It is the peculiarity of wo-

men like Kitty, to whom Nature has denied the governing power of ideas or great personal beauty or magnetism, such as she gave to Miss Muller, that there is a certain impalpable force and attraction in their most petty actions and words, to which men yield. Miss Muller could have watched Kitty all day dragging chairs and trimming lamps, unmoved farther than to pronounce her little better than an idiot. But Peter, Muller or John McCall could not look at her for five minutes without classing her with Cordelia and Desdemona and all the other sweet fools for whom men have died, and whom the world yet keeps sacred in pathetic memory. Some day too, when Catharine should be a mother—though giving to her older children, little more than to the baby on her breast, soft touches and gentle words—she would bind them to her as no other kind of mother could do—by such bonds that until they were gray-haired no power should be like hers. Miss Muller neither saw nor foresaw such things. But Doctor McCall did. "If I had had such a mother I should not have been what I am," he thought. It was a curious fancy to have about a young girl. But she seemed to embody all the womanliness that had been lacking in his life. Of course she was nothing to him. She was to be that prig Muller's wife, and he was quite satisfied that she should be. If he married, Maria Muller would be his wife. Yet, oddly enough, he felt to-night, for the first time, the necessity that Maria should know how marriage was barred out from him, and felt, for the first time, too, a maddening anger that it was so barred. However, Doctor McCall was never meant by Nature for a solitary man housed alone with morbid thoughts: he was the stuff out of which useful citizens are made—John Andersons of husbands, doting, gullible fathers.

Remembering the bar in his life, his skeleton, ghost or whatever it was, he was only moved to get up and stretch himself, saying, "I've stayed in Berrytown too long. When you have told me your plan, I'll say good-bye to you, Miss

Vogdes, and this old house. I shall be off to-morrow."

Kitty had just caught a moth in the flame of the candle. She carried it to the window. "You will come back soon, of course?" her back still toward him.

"No, I think not. I am neglecting my business. And I, of all men in the world, have least right to loiter about this old house, to look in on its home-life or on you."

Kitty gave him a sharp glance, as though some sudden emergency was clear before her which her tact failed to meet. She was folding the bits of muslin at which she had been sewing in a basket: she finished slowly, put the basket away, and sat down at the table, with her elbow on it and her chin on her hand, her gray eyes suggesting a deeper and unspoken meaning to her words: "But for my plan?"

"Ah! to be sure! You want advice?" seating himself comfortably. Her confusion was a pretty thing to watch, the red creeping up her neck into her face, blotting out its delicate tints, the uncertain glances, the full bitten lip. Doctor McCall quite forgot his own trouble in the keen pleasure of the sight.

"Perhaps— You do not quite understand my position here? Mr. Guinness is not my own father."

"No, I knew that."

"But you cannot know what he has been to me: I never knew until the last few days."

"Why within these few days, Miss Vogdes?"

"Because I saw you and Maria: I saw what love was. I began to think about it. I never have loved anybody but him," she went on headlong, utterly blind to all inferences. "There's a thing I can do for him, Doctor McCall, before I marry Mr. Muller, and I must do it. It will make his old age happier than any other part of his life has been."

McCall nodded, leaning forward. It was nothing but an imprudent girl dragging out her secrets before a stranger; nothing but a heated face, wet eyes, a sweet milky breath; but no tragedy he had ever seen on the stage had moved

him so uncontrollably—no, not any crisis in his own life—with such delicious, inexplicable emotion.

"Well, what is it you can do?" after waiting for her to go on.

There was a moment's silence.

"My father," said Kitty, "had once a great trouble. It has made an old man of him before his time. I find that I can take it from him." She looked up at him with this. Now, there was a certain shrewd penetration under the softness of Kitty's eyes. Noting it, McCall instantly lost sight of her beauty and tears. He returned her look coolly.

"What was his trouble?"

"Mr. Guinness had a son. He has believed him to be dead for years: I know that he is not dead."

Doctor McCall waited, with her eyes still upon him. "Well?" he said, attentive.

"And then," pushing back the table and rising, "when I heard that, I meant to go and find Hugh Guinness, and bring him back to his father."

Whatever this matter might be to her hearer, it was the most real thing in life to Catharine, and putting it into words gave it a sudden new force. She felt that she ought to hold her tongue, but she could not. She only knew that the lighted room, the beating of the rain without, the watchful guarded face on the other side of the table, shook and frightened and angered her unaccountably.

"You should not laugh at me," she said. "This is the first work I ever set myself to do. It is better than nursing three hundred children."

"I am not laughing at you, God knows! But this Guinness, if he be alive, remains away voluntarily. There must be a reason for that. You do not consider."

"I do not care to consider. Is the man a log or a stone? If I found him," crossing the room in her heat until she stood beside him—"if I brought him to the old house and to his father? Why, look at this!" dragging open the drawer and taking out the broken gun and rod. "See what he has kept for years—all

that was left him of his boy! Look at that single hair! If Hugh Guinness stood where you do, and touched these things as you are touching them, could he turn his back on the old man?"

Now, Doctor McCall did not touch gun nor cap nor hair, but he bent over the table, looking at them as if he were looking at the dead. He seemed to have forgotten that Kitty was there.

At last he stood upright: "Poor little chap!" with a laugh. "There seemed to be no reason, when he went gunning and fishing like other boys, why he should not stand here to-day with as fair a chance for happiness as any other man. Did there? Just a trifling block laid in his way, a push down hill, and no force could ever drag him up again."

Kitty, her eyes on his, stood silent. Do what he would, he could not shake off her eyes: they wrenched the truth from him. "I knew this man Guinness once," he said.

She nodded: "Yes, I know you did."

"Sit down beside me here, and I will tell you what kind of man he was."

But she did not sit down. An unaccountable terror or timidity seemed to have paralyzed her. She looked aside—everywhere but in his face: "I wanted you to tell me how to reach him, how to touch him: I know what manner of man he is."

"You have heard from your mother? A mixed Border Pike and Mephistopheles, eh? The devil and his victim rolled into one?" He shifted his heavy body uneasily, glancing toward the door. Chief among the graver secret emotions which she had roused in him was the momentary annoyance of not knowing how to deal with this chicken-hearted little girl before him, scared, but on fire from head to foot.

Kitty was quite confident. If it had been Maria Muller who had thus set herself to tamper with a man's life, she would have done it trembling, with fear and self-distrust. She had brains which could feel and react against the passions she evoked, and were competent to warn her of the peril of her work. But as for Kitty—

Here was Hugh Guinness before her, a Cain with the curse of God upon him. It was clearly her business to bring him back again to his father, and afterward convert him into a member of the church, if possible. She went about the work with as little doubt as if it had been the making of a pudding.

But she was shy, tender, womanly withal. Doctor McCall laughed as he looked down at her, and spoke deliberately, as though giving his opinion of a patient to another physician. "I'll tell you honestly my opinion of Hugh Guinness. He was, first of all, a thoroughly ordinary, commonplace man, with neither great virtues nor great vices, nor force of any kind. If he had had that, he could have recovered himself when he began to fall. But he did not recover himself."

"What drove him down in the first place?"

He hesitated: "I suppose that his home and religion became hateful to him. Boys have unreasonable prejudices at times."

"And then, in despair—"

"Despair? Nonsense! Now don't figure to yourself a romantic Hotspur of a fellow rushing into hell because heaven's gate was shut on him. At nineteen Hugh Guinness drank and fought and gambled, as other ill-managed boys do to work off the rank fever of blood. Unfortunately—" he stopped, and then added in a lower voice, quickly, "he made a mistake while the fever was on him which was irretrievable."

"A mistake?" Kitty was always of an inquiring turn of mind, but now she felt as if her curiosity was more than she could bear, while she stood, her eyes passing over the burly figure in summer clothes and the high-featured, pleasant face with its close-cut moustache. What dreadful secret was hid behind this good-humored, every-day propriety of linen duck, friendly eyes and reddish moustache over a mouth that often smiled? You might meet their like any day upon the streets. Was it a murder? At best some crime, perhaps, which had sent him to the penitentiary. Or—and church

taught Kitty shuddered as a vague remembrance of the "unpardonable sin" rose before her like an actual horror. Whatever it was, it stood between herself and him, keeping them apart for ever.

"Irretrievable?" she said. It was only curiosity, she knew, but her voice sounded oddly far off to herself, the room was hazy, her whole body seemed to shrink together.

"What can it matter to you? You belong to another man, Miss Vogdes." She lifted herself erect. Doctor McCall was speaking more loudly than usual and looking keenly into her face.

"I know: I shall be Mr. Muller's wife. Of course, I recollect. But you—this Hugh Guinness is my father's son," stammered Kitty, her face very white. "I had some interest in him."

"Yes, that's true. He is, as you say, in some sort a brother of yours." He took her hand for the first time, looking down at her face with some meaning in his own, inexplicable, very likely, to himself, though the thoughts in Kitty's shallow brain were clear enough to him. "You are tired of standing," seating her gently in Peter's chair. A thick lock of hair had fallen over her face: he put out his hand to remove it, but drew back quickly. "We have talked too long, Miss Vogdes," in a brisk, cheerful tone. "Some other time, perhaps, we can return to this question of Hugh Guinness. That is," with a certain significance of manner, "if it be one in which Mr. Muller wishes you to take an interest." Nodding good-humoredly to her, he buttoned on his oilskin cape and went out into the rain without another word. He pulled off his cap outside to let the rain and wind reach his head, drawing a long breath as if to get rid of some foul air and heat.

CHAPTER X.

Of all that wet August the next morning was the freshest and cheerfulest. Doctor McCall had packed his valise, carried it to the station, and was now

walking up the street, his hands clasped behind him and his head down, after the leisurely fashion of Delaware and Jersey farmers. People nodded an approving good-morning to him. Busy Berrytown had passed verdict on him as a man who was idle for a purpose, who permitted his brain to lie fallow, and who "loafed and invited his soul" during these two weeks for the best spiritual hygienic reasons.

"Too much brain-work, my friend Doctor Maria Muller tells me," said the lawyer, De Camp, to a group of men at the station as McCall passed them. "Is here for repose."

"Advanced?" said little Herr Bluhm, the phrenologist.

"Well, no. But Doctor Maria thinks his mind is open to conviction, and that he would prove a strong worker should he remain here. She has already begun to enlighten him on our newest theories as to a Spontaneous Creation and a Consolidated Republic."

"Should think his properer study would be potatoes. Smells of the barnyard in his talk," rejoined one of the party.

"Doctor Maria's a fool!" snapped Bluhm. "She has read the index to Bastian's book, and denies her Creator, and gabbles of Bacteria, boiled and un-boiled, ever since."

Doctor McCall meanwhile went down the cinder-path, to all passers-by a clean-shaven, healthy gentleman out in search of an appetite for breakfast. But in reality he was deciding his whole life in that brief walk. Why, he asked himself once or twice, should he be unlike the other clean-shaven, healthy men that he met? God knows he had no relish for mystery. He was, as he had told Kitty, a commonplace man, a thrifty Delaware farmer, in hearty good-fellowship with his neighbors, his cattle, the ground he tilled, and, he thought reverently, with the God who had made him and them. He had made a mistake in his early youth, but it was a mistake which every tenth man makes—which had no doubt driven half these men and women about him into their visionary

creeds and hard work—that of an unhappy marriage. It was many years since he had heard of his wife: she had grown tired of warning him of the new paths of shame and crime she had found for herself. In fact, the year in which they had lived together was now so long past as to seem like a miserable half-forgotten dream.

Irretrievable? Yes, it was irretrievable. There was, first of all, the stupid, boyish error of a change of name. If he came back as this child wished, all the annoyance which that entailed would follow him, and the humiliating circumstances which had led to it would be brought to life from their unclean graves. His father believed him dead. Better the quiet, softened grief which that had left than the disgrace which would follow his return. "I should have to tell him my wife's story," muttered McCall. But he did not turn pale nor break into a cold sweat at the remembrance, as Miss Muller's hero should have done. This was an old sore—serious enough, but one which he meant to make the best of, according to his habit. He had been a fool, he thought, to come back and hang about the old place for the pleasure of hearing his father talked of, and of touching the things he had handled a day or two before. Growing into middle age, Hugh Guinness's likeness to his father had increased year by year. The two men were simple as boys in some respects, and would have been satisfied alone together. The younger man halted now on the foot-bridge which crossed the creek, looking out the different hollows where his father had taken him to fish when he was a boy, and thinking of their life then. "But his wife and mine would have to be put into the scales now," with an attempt at whistling which died out discordantly.

There was one person to whom the shameful confession of his marriage must be made—Miss Muller. That was the result, he thought, of his absurd whim of loitering about Berrytown. When he had met Maria Muller before, he had no reason to think she cared a dot whether he was married or single.

Now—McCall's color changed, alone as he was, with shame and annoyance. With all his experience of life and of women, he had as little self-confidence as an awkward girl. But Maria had left him no room for doubt.

"It would be the right thing to do. I ought to tell her. But it will be a slight matter to her, no doubt."

If he had been a single man, in all probability he would have asked Maria Muller to marry him that day. He was a susceptible fellow, with a man's ordinary vanity and passions; and Maria's bright sweet face, their loiterings along shady lanes and under Bourbon roses, the perpetual deference she paid to his stupendous intellect, had had due effect. He was not the man to see a strong, beautiful woman turn pale and tremble at his touch, and preserve his phlegm.

He threw away his cigar, and jumped the fence into the Water-cure grounds. "I'll tell her now, and then be off from old Berrytown for ever."

Miss Muller was standing in the porch. She leaned over the railing, looking at the ragged rain-clouds driven swiftly over the blue distance, and at the wet cornfields and clumps of bay bushes gray with berries which filled the damp air with their pungent smell. Her dog, a little black-and-tan terrier, bit at her skirt. She had just been lecturing to her three students on the vertebrae, and when she took him up could not help fumbling over his bones, even while she perceived the color and scent of the morning. They gave her so keen a pleasure that the tears rushed to her eyes, and she stopped punching Hero's back.

"The rain is over and gone," she recited softly to herself, "the vines with the tender grape give a good smell, and the time of the singing of birds has come." There is no poetry like that old Hebrew love-song. If only it had not been hackneyed by being turned into a theological allegory! Ha, doggy, doggy! There comes a friend of ours! suddenly laughing and hugging him as she caught sight of a large man coming

up the road with a swinging gait and loose white overcoat. She broke off a rose and put it in her breast, tied on her hat and hurried down to meet him, the Song of Solomon still keeping time with her thoughts in a lofty cadence: "'Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon his beloved? Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm. For love is strong as death.'"

"What's that, Maria? I heard you intoning as I came up the hill?" Her eyes were soft and luminous and her voice unsteady. I am afraid Doctor McCall's eyes were warmer in their admiration than they should have been under the circumstances. Why should she not tell him? She repeated it. She had been chattering for two hours on cervical, dorsal and lumbar vertebrae, without stopping to take breath. But she grew red now and broke down miserably.

"'Love is strong as death,' eh?" said McCall, awkwardly holding the gate open for her. "Friendship ought to be tough enough to bear a pretty stout strain, then. Such friendship as ours, I mean. For I think a man and woman can be friends without—without—Well, what do you think, Maria?" feeling a sudden imbecility in all his big body.

The little woman beside him looked up scared and ready to cry: "I don't know, John, I'm sure. Do be quiet, Hero!" Then like a flash she saw that he meant to ask her to marry him: he meant to place love upon the higher basis of friendship. Maria was used to people who found new names for old things. Why! why! what folly was this, as she grew cold and hot by turns? So often she had pictured his coming to claim her, and how she would go out as one calm controlling soul should to meet another, to be dual yet united through all eternity; and here she was shivering and tongue-tied, like any silly school-girl! Love-making and marriage were at a discount with the Advanced Club of which she was a member, and classed with dancing, fashionable dressing and other such paltry feminine frivolities.

But Maria had meant to show them that a woman could really love and marry, and preserve her own dignity. She tried to find her footing now.

"Come into the summer-house, John. I should think our friendship would bear any strain, for it does not depend on external ties."

"No, that's true. Now, as to your phalansteries and women's clubs and sitz-baths, why that's all flummery to me. But young women must have their whims until they have husbands to occupy their minds, I suppose. There's that little girl at the Book-shop: how many leagues of tatting do you suppose she makes in a year?"

"I really cannot say," sharply.

"But as to our friendship, Maria—"

"Yes. There may be a lack of external bonds" (speaking deliberately, for she wanted to remember this crisis of her life as accurate in all its minutiae); "but there is a primal unity, a mysterious sympathy, in power and emotion. At least, so it seems to me," suddenly stammering and picking up Hero to avoid looking at McCall, who stood in front of her.

"I don't know. Primal unities are rather hazy to me. I can tell by a woman's eye and hand-shake if she is purg-mined and sweet-tempered, and pretty well, too, what she thinks of me. That's about as far as I go."

"It pleases you to wear this mask of dullness, I know," with an indulgent smile, with which Titania might have fondled the ass's head.

"But as to our friendship," gravely, "I feel I've hardly been fair to you. Friendship demands candor, and there is one matter on which I have not dealt plainly with you. You have been an honest, firm friend to me, Maria. I had no right to withhold my confidence from you."

If Miss Muller had not been known as an advanced philosopher, basing her life upon the Central Truths, she would have gained some credit as a shrewd woman of business. "What do you mean, John?" she said, turning a cool steady countenance toward him.

"Sit down and I will tell you what I mean."

The patients, talking soon after their two hours' exercise, made their jokes on the battle between the two systems, seeing the allopathist McCall and Doctor Maria Haynes Muller in the summer-house engaged in such long and earnest converse. Homœopathy, they guessed, had the worst of it, for the lady was visibly agitated and McCall apparently unmoved. Indeed, when he left her and crossed the garden, nodding to such of them as he knew, he had a satisfied, relieved face.

Maria went immediately in to visit her ward as usual. The patients observed that she was milder than was her wont, and deadly pale. One of them, addressing her as "Miss Muller," however, was sharply rebuked: "I earned my right to the title of physician too hardly to give it up for that which belongs to every simpering school-girl," she said. "Besides," with a queer pitiful smile, "the sooner we doctors sink the fact that we are women the better for the cause—and for us."

She met her brother in the course of the morning, and drew him into the consulting-room.

"William," she said, fumbling with the buttons of his coat, "he is going: he is going to take the afternoon train."

"Who? That fellow McCall?"

"Why do you speak so of him, William? He has just told me his story. He is so wretched! he has been used so hardly!" She could scarcely keep back the tears. In her new weakness and weariness it was such comfort to talk to and hang upon this fat, stupid little brother, whom usually she despised.

"Wretched, eh? He don't look it, then. As stout and easy-going a fellow as I know. Come, come, Maria! The man has been imposing some story on you to work on your sensibilities. I never fancied him, as you know. He

doesn't want to borrow money, eh?" with sudden alarm.

"Money? No."

"What is it, then? Don't look at me in that dazed way. You are going to have one of your attacks. I do wish you had Kitty's constitution and some sense."

"William," rousing herself, "he is going. He will never come back to Berrytown or to me. Our whole lives depend on my seeing him once more. Ask him to wait for a day—an hour."

"If he doesn't take the noon express, he can't go in an hour. You certainly know that, Maria. Well, if I have to find him, I'd better go at once," buttoning his coat irritably. "I never did like the fellow."

"Beg him to stay. Tell him that I have thought of a way of escape," following him, catching him by his sleeve, her small face absolutely without color and her eyes glittering.

"Yes, I'm going. But I must find my overshoes first. It begins to look like rain."

Miss Muller watched him to the door, and then crossed the hall to her own room, locking the door behind her. The square table was piled with medical books. She sat down and dropped her head on her arms. Over went a bound volume of the *Lancet* and a folio on diseases of the kidneys to the floor. She looked down at them. "And I was willing to give him up for that—that trash!" sobbing and rubbing her arms like a beaten child. But she had so strong a habit of talking that even in this pain the words would come: "I loved him so. He would have married me! And I must be kept from him by a law of society! It is—it is," rising and wrenching her hands together, "a damnable law!"

For Miss Muller had taught herself to think and talk like a man.

PART IV.

CHAPTER XI.

CATHARINE sprang from her bed at daybreak that morning. She could scarcely stop singing in the bath. She had so much to do, so much to do! The air blew briskly, the factory bells were clanging, the bees buzzed, the pretty white curtains were flapping. It was a busy world, and she was busiest of all. Had she not Hugh Guinness's fate in hand? She felt like a lad when he comes of age or makes his first venture in business. Jane heard her singing noisily for a while, but when breakfast was ready she did not come down.

She was standing in front of her glass, staring at it as though the chubby, insignificant face there were the Sphinx and could answer the riddles of life. McCall's remark had suddenly recurred to her: "What is Hugh Guinness to you? You belong to another man." With a flash, Mr. Muller, natty and plump, had stood before her, curiously unfamiliar, mildly regarding her through his spectacles. *Her husband!* Why had she never understood that until this morning? Her crossed hands lay on her wide blue-veined shoulders. She almost tore the flesh from them. "I belong to no man!" she cried.

She could not shake off the thought of him, as she usually did. He stood beside her, do what she would—the fat body and legs, the finical dress, the wearisome platitudes, a regiment of blue-coated, thick-lipped children behind him.

"If the best were done for them that could be hoped, they would but grow up miniature Mullers; and to think of *that!*" said Kitty. She had given her life to him. If she lived to be gray-headed, he alone owned her, mind and body. "If I were dead in my coffin, he would put his mild, fat little hand on me, and look forward to owning me in heaven! Oh-h!" This last was the one unendurable pang to Catharine.

Jane at the moment thrust her black face in: "He's come. Hurry up, honey! Mr. Muller, ob course. Shall I do up your hair, chile?"

Kitty shook her head and smiled. She would have had a kind smile for Jane and her like if she had been held by thumbscrews. Stooping to button her gaiters, she caught sight of her face in the glass. There were dark hollows under the eyes: they had the look of an older, graver woman than she had ever been before. Kitty hung up the green dress she had meant to wear, and took down a rose-colored one. Mr. Muller was talking down stairs. There was reality. There was her work and her husband. Why, she had the account-books of the school in her upper bureau-drawer at that moment, and in the lower ones her wedding things. Dresses and cloaks all made; and such lovely linen! As for Hugh Guinness, he was, after all, but a perplexing shadow, a riddle that turned from her the more she tried to make him real. She went down.

"Why, Catharine!" He held her hand, patting it between his own, which were warm and moist. "I really could not deny myself a glimpse of you, though I was sent on an errand by Maria to the station. But all roads end for me in the Book-shop. That is natural—he! he!"

"Yes, it is natural."

"It must be only a glimpse, though. I begged of Jane a cup of hot tea, to take off the chill of this morning air. Ah, here it is: thank you, my good girl. Only a glimpse, for Maria's business was urgent: Maria's business always is urgent. But I was to intercept Doctor McCall on his way to the cars."

"Is he going this morning?"

"Yes. Not to return, it appears."

"Not to return?" Her voice seemed hardly to have the energy of a question in it.

"But I," with a shrug and significant

laugh, "am not to allow him to go. Behold in me an emissary of Love! You would not have suspected a Mercury in your William, Catharine?" Within the last month he had begun to talk down in this fashion to her, accommodating himself to her childish tastes.

"What is Mercury's errand?"

"Aha! you curious little puss! How a woman does prick her ears at the mention of a love-story! Though, I suppose, this one is wellnigh its end. Maria made no secret of it. Doctor McCall, I inferred from what she said, had been pouring out his troubles in her ear, and she sent me to bring him back to her with the message that she had found a way of escape from them. Eh? Did you speak? You did not know *what*, dear?"

"I did not know that Maria had the right to bring him back. They are—"

"Engaged? Oh, certainly. At least—It is an old attachment, and Maria is such a woman to manage, you know! Is that the tea-pot, Jane? Just fill my cup again. Oh yes, I suppose it is all settled."

Catharine was standing by the window. The wind blew in chilly and strong, while Mr. Muller behind her sipped his tea and ambled in his talk. Crossing the meadow, going down the road, she saw the large figure of a man in a loose light overcoat, who swung in his gait and carried his hat in his hand as a boy would do. Even if he had loved her, she could not, like Maria, have gone a step to meet him, nor intoned the Song of Solomon. But he did not love her.

She turned to her companion: "There is something I wished to say."

"In one moment, my dear." He was sweetening his tea. Hanging the silver tongs on the lid, he looked up: "Good God, Catharine! what is it?"

"I wished to tell you—no, don't touch me, please—this is a mistake which we have made, and it is better to let it go no farther. It ought to end now."

"End? Now?" But he was not surprised. The pale face staring at her over the half-emptied cup looked as if it had been waiting to hear this; so that

they began the subject, as it were, in the middle. So much had already been said between them without words. He set the cup down, even in that moment folding his napkin neatly with shaking fingers. Kitty did not laugh. She never laughed at him afterward. Something in that large, loose figure yonder, going away from her to the woman he loved, had whetted her eyesight and her judgment. She saw the man at last under Muller's weak finical ways, and the manly look he gave her.

"You mean that there must be no—no marriage?"

"No. I'm very sorry. It has been my fault. But I thought—"

"You thought you loved me, and you do not. Don't cry, Kitty."

A long silence followed, which seemed to Catharine like that of death. It was noticeable that he did not make a single effort to change her resolution or to keep her. It seemed as if he must have been waiting for her to waken some day and see the gulf between them.

"Don't cry, Kitty," he said again, under his breath. He stood by the empty fireplace, resting his dainty foot on the fender and looking down on it: he took out his handkerchief, shook out its folds and wiped his face, which was hot and parched. Kitty was sorry, as she said—sorry and scared, as though she had been called on to touch the corpse of one dear to her friends, but whose death cost her nothing. That she was breaking an obligation she had incurred voluntarily troubled her very little.

"Yes, I thought you would say this one day," he said at last. "I think you are right to take care of yourself. I was too old a man for you to marry. But I would have done all I could. I have been very fond of you," looking at her.

"Yes. You never seemed old to me sir."

"And your work for the poor children? I thought, dear, you felt that the Lord called you to that?"

"So I did. But I don't think I feel it so much to-day." Catharine's eyes were wide with this new terror. Was she, then, turning her back on her God?

She was, after all, he thought, nothing but a frightened, beautiful child.

"I should have been too rough for you," he said. How was he to suspect the heights from which she had looked down on his softness and flippancy?

She observed that he said not a word of the preparations he had made, the house furnished, the expectant congregation, or the storm of gossip and scandal which would follow him as a jilted lover. Was the real wound, then, so deep? Or did he overlook such trifles, as men do?

"I did not forget the new dresses and underclothes," thought Kitty, mean and mortified.

He roused himself as Jane came in: "No, Jane, no more tea. Yes, that is my cup on the mantel-shelf."

"Dah's a gen'leman, Miss Kitty. I took him in the Book-shop. 'T mought be Spellissy 'bout de oats. Tink it is Spellissy."

"You had better go, Catharine," taking up his hat.

"It is not important." The door closed after Jane. She came close to him, irresolute. What could she say? She thought, with the heat of childishness, that she would give the blood out of her body, drop by drop, to comfort him. She wished that she had gone on and married him. "But I cannot say that I love him." This was a matter for life and death—even Kitty's polite soul recognized that—and not for a civil lie.

Again the man asserted himself before the woman: "No, there is nothing for you to say, Catharine," smiling. "There are some things it is better not to varnish over with words." He took up his hat after a pause, and turned a feeble, uncertain face to the window: "I—I might as well go now: I have a prayer-meeting this afternoon."

"And when you go you mean never to come back again?" cried Kitty, pale and red in a moment. "That's to be the end of it all?"

"What more can there be? It's all said." Yet after he had walked to the door he stood on the steps, looking about the room which had grown so familiar

and dear to him. At Kitty he did not look.

"Will you have a rose?" breaking one hastily from the trailing branches at the window. "To remember the old Book-shop." She had never given him anything before.

He threw it down: "I do not need a rose to make me remember," bitterly. "It is all said, child? You have nothing to tell me?" looking furtively at her.

For a long time she did not speak: "No, nothing."

"Good-bye, Kitty."

Kitty did not answer him. The tears ran hot and salt over her round cheeks as she watched the little man disappear through the walnuts. She went up stairs, and, still crying, chose one or two maudlin sonnets and a lock of black hair as mementoes to keep of him. She did keep them as long as she lived, and used frequently to sigh over them with a sentimental tenderness which the real Muller never had won from her.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS MULLER'S message was never delivered, but Doctor McCall did not leave Berrytown that morning. Going down the road, he had caught sight of the old Book-house, and Kitty in her pink wrapper at the window. He overheard Symmes, the clerk at the station, say to some loungeur that Peter Guinness would be at home that day or the next. He took his valise to the baggage-room.

"My business is not pressing," he said to Symmes. "No need to be off until this evening."

Perhaps he could see the old man, himself unseen, he thought with a boyish choking in his throat. He could surely give one more day to the remembrance of that old sweet, hearty boy's life without wronging the wretched ghost of a wife whose hand clutched so much away from him.

Miss Muller, seeing him on the bridge from the windows of her room, supposed her message had been given: "He has stayed to know how he may win me."

For the first time she faced the riddle squarely. In the morning she had only wished weakly to keep him beside her.

He was married. Popular novels offered recipes by the score for the cure of such difficulties in love. But Maria was no reader of novels. Out of a strict Calvinistic family she and her brother had leaped into heterodoxy—William to pause neatly poised on the line where Conventionalism ended; Maria to flounder in an unsounded quagmire, which she believed the well of Truth. Five years ago she would have felt her chance of salvation in danger if she had spoken to a woman who persisted in loving a married man. But five years work strange changes in the creeds of young women now-a-days; and Maria's heart was choosing her creed for her to-day, according to the custom of her sex.

She saw Doctor McCall idly leaning over the foot-bridge of the creek while he smoked. Passion and brilliancy unknown to them before came into her dark eyes: she stretched out her hands as though she would have dragged him to her: "Must I give him up because of this wife whom he long ago cast off?"

If she tempted him to marry her? She knew what name her old church, her old friends, even her father, who was still living, would apply to her. Some of these people with whom she had lately cast in her lot had different views on the subject of marriage. Hitherto, Maria had kept clear of them. "The white wings of her Thought," she had said, "should not be soiled by venturing near impurity." Now she remembered their arguments against marriage as profound and convincing.

"I could not suggest to him myself this way of escape," she thought, the red dying her face and neck. "I could not." But there was to be a meeting that very evening of the "Inner Light Club," in which Maria was a M. H. G. (Most Honorable Guide), and the subject for discussion would be, "Shall marriage in the Advanced Consolidated Republic be for life or for a term of years?" The profoundest thinkers in

the society would bring to this vital question all their strength and knowledge, and, as they had all made up their minds beforehand against bondage and babies, the verdict was likely to be unanimous.

She would contrive that McCall should be one of the audience: the wisdom and truth of the arguments would shine in like a great light on his life, and he would start up a new man, throwing aside this heaviest yoke of social slavery. She would be there ("with a black lace mantilla and veil—so much better than a bonnet," she breathlessly remembered), and at the sight of her he would see the divine force of true love bringing them together, and claim her as his own.

The modern Cleopatra fights upon the rostrum, in lieu of "sixty sail," and uses as weapons newspaper and club, instead of purple robe and "cloyless sauce of epicurean cook," but the guerdon of the battle is none the less Mark Antony.

At sundown that evening Doctor McCall was piloted by little Herr Bluhm to his office; the Herr, according to his wont, sternly solemn, McCall disposed to be hilarious, as suited the pleasant temperature of the evening.

"Club, eh? Inner Light? Oh yes, I've no objections. One picks up good ideas here, there, anywhere. Meets in your office?"

"Yes—a shabby, vulgar place to the outer eye, but so many noble souls have there struggled out of darkness into light, such mighty Truths have been born there which will guide the age, that to me it is the very Holy Ground of Ideas."

"So?" McCall looked at the little man out of the corner of his eye, and nodded gravely.

"It is a Woman's Club, though men take part in it. But we have such faith in the superior integrity and purity of woman's mind when brought to bear on great but hackneyed questions that we willingly stand back until she has given her verdict. The magnet, sir, pointing out with inexplicable intelligence the true path to humanity."

"Well, I don't know about that.

Though it's very likely, very likely," hurriedly. McCall had no relish for argument about it. He was more secure of his intellect in the matter of peaches than inner lights. Cowed and awed as he could have been by no body of men, he followed Bluhm up a dirty flight of stairs into the assemblage of Superior Women. The office was by nature a chamber with gaudy wall-paper of bouquets and wreaths. Viewed as an office, it was well enough, but in the æsthetic light of a Holy Ground of Ideas it needed sweeping. The paper, too, hung in flaps from the damp walls: dusty files of newspapers, an empty bird-cage, old boots, a case of medical books, a pair of dilapidated trousers filled up one side of the room. A pot of clove-pinks in the window struggled to drown with spicy fragrance the odor of stale tobacco smoke. There was a hempen carpet, inch deep with mud and dust, on the floor. Seated round an empty fireplace, on cane chairs and in solemn circle, were about forty followers of the Inner Light. McCall perceived Maria near the window, the dusky twilight bringing out with fine effect her delicate, beautiful face. He turned quickly to the others, looking for the popular type of the Advanced Female, in loose sacque and men's trousers, with bonnet a-top, hair cut short, sharp nose and sharper voice. She was not there. A third of the women were Quakers, with their calm, benign faces for the most part framed by white hair—women who, having fought successfully against slavery, when that victory was won had taken up arms against the oppressors of women with devout and faithful purpose. The rest McCall declared to himself to be "rather a good-looking lot—women who had," he guessed shrewdly, "been in lack of either enough to eat or somebody to love in the world, and who fancied the ballot-box would bring them an equivalent for a husband or market-money."

A little dish-faced woman in rusty black, and with whitish curls surmounted by a faded blue velvet bonnet laid flat on top of her head, had the floor: "Mr. Chairman—I mean Miss Chairman—

the object of our meeting this evening is, Shall marriage in the Consolidated Republic—"

"I object!" Herr Bluhm sprang to his feet, wrapping a short mantle like a Roman toga across his chest, and wearing a portentous frown upon his brow. "There is business of the last meeting which is not finished. Shall the thanks of this club be presented to the owners of the Berrytown street-cars for free passes therein? That is the topic for consideration. I move that a vote of thanks be passed;" and he sat down gloomily.

"I do not second that motion." A tall woman, with the magisterial sweep of shawl and wave of the arm of a cheap boarding-house keeper, rose. "I detect a subtle purpose in that offer. There is a rat behind that arras. There is a prejudice against us in the legislature, and the car company wish no mention of Woman Suffrage to be made in Berrytown until their new charter is granted. Are we so cheaply bought?—bribed by a dead-head ticket!"

"The order of the day," resumed the little widow placidly, "is, Shall marriage in the Consol—"

"Legislature!" piped a weak voice in the crowd. "They only laugh at us in the legislature."

"Let them laugh: they laughed at the slave." The speaker hurled this in a deep bass voice full at McCall. She was a black-browed, handsome young woman, wrapped in a good deal of scarlet, who sat sideways on one chair with her feet on the rung of another. "How long will the world dare to laugh?" fixing him fiercely with her eye.

"Upon my word, madam, I don't know," McCall gasped, and checked himself, hot and uncomfortable.

A fat, handsomely-dressed woman jolted the chair in front of her to command attention: "On the question of marriage—"

"Address the chair," growled Bluhm.

"Miss Chairman, I want to say that I ought to be qualified to speak on marriage, being the mother of ten, to say nothing of twice twins."

"The question before the house is the

street-car passes," thundered Bluhm. "I move that we at least thank them for their offer. When a cup of tea is passed me, I thank the giver: when the biscuits are handed, I do likewise. It is a simple matter of courtesy."

"I deny it," said the black-browed female with a tone of tragedy. "What substantial tea has been offered? what biscuits have been baked? It is not tea: it is bribery! It is not biscuits: it is corruption!"

"I second Herr Bluhm's motion."

"Miss Chairman, put the question on its passage."

A mild old Quakeress rose, thus called on: "Thee has made a motion, Friend Bluhm, and Sister Carr says she seconds it; so it seems to me— Indeed I don't understand this parliamentary work."

"You're doing very nicely."

"All right!" called out several voices.

"Why should we have these trivial parliamentary forms?" demanded the Tragic Muse, as McCall called her. "Away with all worn-out garments of a degraded Past! Shall the rebellious serf of man still wear his old clothes?"

"But," whispered McCall to Bluhm, "when will the great thinkers you talked of begin to speak on those mighty truths—"

"Patience! These are our great thinkers. The logical heads some of them have! Woman," standing up and beginning aloud, apropos to nothing—"Woman is destined to purify the ballot-box, reform the jury, whiten the ermine of the judge. [Applause.] When her divine intuitions, her calm reason, are brought into play—" Prolonged applause, in the midst of which Bluhm, again apropos to nothing, abruptly sat down.

"The order of the day," said the little woman in black, "is, Shall marriage—"

"What about the car company?"

"Let's shelve that."

"The question of marriage," began Bluhm, up again with a statelier wrap of his toga, "is the most momentous affecting mankind. It demands free speech, the freest speech. Are we resolved to approach it in proud humility,

giving to the God within ourselves and within our neighbor freedom to declare the truth?"

"Ay!" "Ay!" from forty voices. Maria, pale and trembling, watched McCall.

"Free speech is our boast," piped the widow. "If not ours, whose?"

"Before you go any farther," said the Muse with studied politeness, "I have a question to put to Herr Bluhm. Did you or did you not, sir, in Toombs's drug-store last week, denominate this club a caravan of idiots?" A breathless silence fell upon the assembly. Bluhm gasped inarticulately. "His face condemns him," pursued his accuser. "Shall such a man be allowed to speak among us? Ay, to take the lead among us?"

Cries of "No!" "No!"

"What becomes of your free speech?" cried Bluhm, red and stammering with fury. "I was angry. I am rough, perhaps, but I seek the truth, as those do not who"—advancing and shaking his shut hand at the Muse—"who smile and smile, and are a villain still."

"The order of the day"—the widow's voice rose above the din tranquilly—"is, Shall marriage in the Consolidated Republic be contracted for life or for a term of years?"

The next moment Maria felt her arm grasped. "Come out of this," whispered McCall, angry and excited. "This is no place for you, Maria. Did you hear what they are going to discuss?"

"Yes," as he whisked her out of the door.

"Then I'm sorry for it. Such things oughtn't to be mentioned in a lady's presence. If I had a sister, she should not know there was such a thing as bigamy. Good God!" wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, "if women are not pure and spotless, what have we to look up to? And these shallow girls, who propose to reform the world, begin by dabbling with the filth of the gutter, if they do no worse?"

"Shallow girls?" He was so big and angry that she felt like a wren or sparrow in his hold. But the stupidity of him! the blind idiocy! She eyed him

from head to foot with a bitterness and contempt unutterable—a handsome six-foot animal, with his small brain filled with smaller, worn-out prejudices! The way of escape had been set before him, and he had spurned it—and her!

"I don't see what it can matter to you," she said politely, disengaging herself, "whether I make friends with these people and am stained with the filth of the gutter or not?" She had a half-insane consciousness that she was playing her last card.

"Why, to be sure it matters. You and I have been good friends always, Maria, and I don't like to see you fellowship with that lot. What was it Bluhm called them?" laughing. "That was rough in Bluhm—rough. They're women."

"You are going."

"In the next train, yes. I waited to see a—a friend, but he did not come. It's just as well, perhaps," his face saddened. "Well, good-bye, Maria. Don't be offended at me for not approving of your friends. Why, bless my soul! such talk is—it's not decent," and with a careless shake of the hand he was gone.

Maria told herself that she despised a man who could so dismiss the great social problem and its prophets with a flip of his thumb. She turned to go in to the assemblage of prophets. They were all that was left her in life. But she did not go in. She went to her bare chamber, and took Hero up on her lap and cried over him. "You love me, doggy?" she said.

She had an attack of syncope that night, for which no pack or sitz proved a remedy; and it was about that time that the long and painful affection of the ulnar nerve began which almost destroyed her usefulness as a surgeon.

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT evening, as Miss Muller sat alone with Hero in her room (just as the neuralgia was beginning), the door opened and Miss Vogdes entered. The

girl turned a harassed, worn countenance toward Maria, and stumbled awkwardly over her words. It was not, certainly, because she was conscious that she had used William Muller cruelly. She had forgotten that William Muller lived.

She had been thinking of Maria all day. She was the woman whom Doctor McCall loved. By the time night came Kitty had a maddening desire to see again this woman that he loved—to touch her, hear her speak. She had been used to regard her as a disagreeable bore, but now she looked on her as a woman set apart from all the world. She had made a poor excuse to come up to the Water-cure: now that she was there she half forgot it. Maria's delicate face, her quick grace of motion, her clear, well-bred voice, were so many stabs to Kitty, each of which touched the quick. Maria's hair hung loosely over her shoulders: it was very soft and thick. She wondered if Doctor McCall had ever touched it. "Though what right have I to know?" For some reason this last was the pang that tugged hardest at Kitty's heart.

"I brought a message for Doctor McCall," she said, fumbling in her pocket—"that is, for you to deliver to him, Maria."

Miss Muller turned her shoulder to her: "Doctor McCall is gone—I don't know where."

She started forward: "Gone? To come again, you mean?"

"No—never to come back!" vehemently.

Kitty stood by her silent a moment: "William told me that you sent for him, that he loved you, Maria—that you would be married some of these days."

Miss Muller hesitated: there was no use in revealing her humiliation to this girl: "There was an obstacle in the way. Doctor McCall is peculiarly hedged in by circumstances."

"And you could not find the way of escape?"

"No." She did not see the flash of triumph on the girl's face, or notice when she went out.

Kitty was human. "At least," she muttered going down the hill, "I shall not have to see *her* his wife." When she had reached the Book-shop she took from her pocket a coarse yellow envelope containing a telegram directed to Hugh Guinness in his father's care. She turned it over. This was a bond between them which even Maria did not share: she alone knew that he was Hugh Guinness.

"What am I to do with this?"

Doctor McCall was gone, never to come back. It was like touching his hand far off to read this message to him. Besides, Kitty was curious. She opened the envelope.

"Come to me at once. You will soon be free," without any signature but an initial. The melodramatic mystery of it would have cautioned knowing women, but Kitty was not knowing.

"If he had received this an hour ago, the 'way of escape' would have been found. He would have been free to marry Maria." So much she understood. She sat down and was quiet for half an hour. It was the first wretched half hour of her life—so wretched that she forgot to cry.

"It would make him very happy to marry Maria," she said, getting up and speaking aloud. Then she opened the door and went up to her chamber, her thoughts keeping time with her swift motions. It seemed to her that she still spoke aloud. "If I were a man I could go to this house in Philadelphia and receive this message, which will set him free" (beginning to fold the dresses in her closet). "It will never reach him otherwise. I could find and bring him to Maria. But I never was five miles from Berrytown in my life. I never could go" (dragging out a great trunk and packing the dresses into it). "It would be a friendly thing for some man to do for him. Maria could not do, so much" (cramming in undergarments enough for a year's wear). "If I were a man! He'd not snub me then as he does now, when I am only Kitty. If this could be done it would bring happiness for life to him." (The trunk was packed as she had seen

her mother's. She was on her knees, trying to force down the lid, but her wrists were too weak.) "He would come back at once. How lovely Maria looked in that black lace mantilla! He would kiss her mouth and smooth her hair." (Kitty, still kneeling, was staring at the wall with pale cheeks and distended eyes. The lock snapped as it shut. She rose and began putting on her gray hat and veil.) "No woman could go to the city through that dark; and there is a storm coming. If I did it, what would he care for me? I am only Kitty. I would sit in the window here alone year after year, growing into a neglected old maid, and watch him go by with his happy wife and children. I need not interfere. I can throw the telegram into the fire and let them both go their ways. What are they to me?" She had buttoned her sacque and gloves, and now went up to the glass. It was a childish face that she looked at, but one now exceptionally grave and reserved.

She walked quickly down and tapped at the kitchen door: "When the porter comes for my trunk, Jane, give it to him. Tell my mother when she comes it was necessary for me to leave home to help a friend. I shall be back in a few days—if I am alive."

"De Lord be good to us, honey!" Jane stood aghast. Kitty came suddenly up to the old woman and kissed her. She felt quite alone in the world in beginning this desperate undertaking. The next moment she passed the window and was gone.

Miss Muller, with a satchel and shawl-strap, would have started coolly at an hour's notice alone for the Yosemite or Japan. But Kitty, with the enormous trunk, which was her sole idea of travel, set out through the night and storm, feeling death clutching at her on every side.

An hour after nightfall that evening the Eastern express-train reached the station beyond Berrytown, bringing home Peter and his wife, triumphant. Her money had covered a larger extent of muslins and laces than she hoped for—enough to convert the raw school-

girl Kitty, when she was married, into a leader of church-going fashion.

Mrs. Guinness leaned back in the plush car-seat, planning the wedding-breakfast. That was now her only care. Out in the world of shops and milliners her superstitious dread of a man long since dead had seemed to her absurd.

"I have had some unreasonable fears about Kitty," she said to Peter, who was beginning to nod opposite to her. "But all will be well when she is Muller's wife."

Another train passed at the moment they reached the station. Her eye ran curiously over the long line of faces in the car-windows to find some neighbor or friend.

She touched Peter's arm: "How like that is to Kitty!" nodding toward a woman's head brought just opposite to them. The train began to move, and the woman turned her face toward them: "Merciful Heaven, it *is* Kitty!"

The engine sent out its shrill foreboding whistle and rushed on, carrying the girl into the darkness. Behind her in the car as it passed her mother saw the face of Hugh Guinness.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOCTOR MCCALL had been five minutes too late for the first train, and so had been delayed for the express in which Kitty started on her adventure. Commonplace accidents determine commonplace lives, was a favorite maxim of the Berrytown Illuminati. The Supreme Intelligence whom they complimented with respect could not be expected to hold such petty trifles or petty lives in His controlling hand.

Doctor McCall had seen Catharine when she first entered the station. Her very manner had the air of flight and secrecy. Puzzled and annoyed, he sat down in the rear of the car, himself unseen. When they reached Philadelphia it was not yet dawn. The passengers rushed out of the cars: Kitty sat quiet. She had never slept outside of the Book-house before. She looked out at the dim-

lighted dépôt, at the slouching dark figures that stole through it from time to time, the engines, with their hot red eyes, sweeping back and forward in the distance, breaking the night with portentous shrieks. Where should she go? She had never been in a hotel in her life: she had no money. If she ventured into the night she would be arrested, no doubt, as a vagrant. She had a gallant heart to take care of Hugh Guinness's life, but her poor little woman's body was quaking in deadly fear for herself. In a moment a decent mulatto woman, whom McCall had sent, came from the waiting-room into the deserted car.

"There is a room for ladies, where you can be comfortable until daybreak, madam," she said respectfully.

"I am much obliged to you," said Catharine.

When she saw how young she was, the mulatto, a motherly body, took her into a little inner snugery used to store packages: "You can turn the key, and sleep if you will until morning."

"I'll not close my eyes until my errand is done," thought Kitty, and sat down in a rocking-chair, placing her satchel beside her. In five minutes she was fast asleep. McCall, pacing up and down the platform, could see her through the open window. He forgot to wonder why she had come. There was a certain neatness and freshness about her which he thought he had never observed in other women. After her night's travel her dress fell soft and gray as though just taken from the fold, her petticoat, crisp and white, peeped in one place to sight. How dainty and well-fitting were the little boots and gloves! Where the hair was drawn back, too, from her forehead he could see the blue veins and pink below the skin, like a baby's. He did not know before what keen eyes he had. But this was as though a breath of the old home when he had been a child, one of the dewy Bourbon roses in his father's garden, had followed him to the stifling town. It made the station different—even the morning. Fresh damp winds blew pleasantly from the

reddening sky. The white marble steps and lintels of the street shone clean and bright; the porters going by to the freight dépôt gave him good-day cheerfully. In the window the old mulatto had some thriving pots of ivy and fragrant geraniums. Even a dog that came frisking up the sidewalk rubbed itself in a friendly fashion against his legs.

McCall suddenly remembered a journey he had made long ago, and a companion whose breath was foul with opium as her head at night rested on his shoulder. But there was no need that one woman's breath should sicken him even now with the whole world; and again he stopped in his walk to look at Kitty.

The fresh wind blowing on her wakened her presently. The mulatto was anxious to serve her: it was always the case with people of her class after Kitty had once spoken to them.

"I should like fresh water and towels," she said coolly, as though toilet appurtenances were to be found at every street corner. The woman paused, and then with a queer smile brought them. In a few moments McCall saw her come out fresher than before.

"Where is this house?" showing a name and number to the mulatto, who read it once or twice, and then looked steadily at Kitty.

"Are you going alone to that place?"

"Certainly."

The woman gave her the directions without further parley, adding that it was about six miles distant, and turned away. Catharine followed her to thank her, and put a dollar note in her hand. It was all the money she had.

She walked on down the rapidly filling streets—for miles, as she thought. The hurry and rush of the day had begun. The sense of nothingness in the midst of this great multitude came upon Kitty. The fear, the excitement began to tell on her: yesterday she had eaten but little in her pity for Muller. "Which was very foolish of me," she said to herself. "Now I've no money to buy anything to eat. I have acted in this matter without common sense." The sun lighted up the yellow leaves of the maples

along the sidewalk. The wind blew strongly up from the rivers. She passed a stand with some withered apples and stale cakes, and put her hand in her pocket, then with a wistful look went on.

It was late in the morning before she reached her journey's end. Showing her paper now and then, she had noticed the curious inquiring look which both men and women gave her on reading it. She found herself at last under a long gray stone wall pierced by an iron-knobbed gate. By the side of it a man was setting out on an eating-stand a half-eaten ham, chaffy rolls and pies yellow with age. The man was an old, cleanly shaven fellow, whose aquiline nose reminded her with a twinge of conscience of Mr. Muller.

"Am I near to this house?" showing her paper.

"Here," nodding back at the stone wall, cutting his pies.

"This! What is this place, sir?"

"Moyamensing Prison." He finished cutting the pies carefully, and then, wiping the knife, looked up at her, and suddenly came from behind the stand:

"You're not well?" pushing a seat toward her. "Here's some water. Or coffee?"

She sat down: "Oh, it's nothing. Only I've traveled a long way, and I did not know it was a prison I was coming to."

"Won't you have some coffee? You don't look rugged."

"No, thank you."

"Well, it's not what you've been used to, of course. But hot." He put the water within her reach and drew aside, looking at her now and then. He was used to the pale faces and tears of women at that gate. "Though she's different from them as has friends here," he thought, silencing one or two noisy customers by a look. Presently he came up to her: "You're afraid to go in there alone, young lady?"

"Yes, I am. What shall I do?"

"I thought as much. Yonder comes the chaplain. I'll speak to him," going to meet two gentlemen who crossed the street.

"You wished to see a prisoner?" one of them said, coming up to her.

Kitty was herself again. She stood up and bowed with her old-fashioned, grave politeness: "I do not know. It was this that brought me here," handing him the telegram.

"Ah? I remember," glancing at it. "Number 243 sent it, you recollect?" to his companion. "But this is addressed to Hugh Guinness?" turning inquiringly to Kitty.

"I am a—member of his family. He was not at home, and I came to receive the message for him."

"Will you go in with us, doctor?" The chaplain turned to his companion.

"Presently. There is a man coming up the street I want to see."

The chaplain motioned her to follow him, casting a curious glance back at her. They passed up into the long stone corridors, tier over tier, with the lines of square iron doors, each with its slate dangling outside, with a name scrawled on it. He stopped at one, opened it and drew back, motioning her to enter.

Kitty caught sight of the damp wall of a cell, and stopped.

"Shall I go in with you?" seeing her shiver.

"No: Mr. Guinness might wish the message kept as private as possible."

"It is very probable. The prisoner is very ill, or you could not have a private interview."

She went in, and the door closed behind her. It was a moment before she could distinguish any object in the dimly lighted cell. Then she saw the square window, the cobwebbed walls, and close at hand a narrow pallet, on which lay a woman in a coarse and soiled night-dress. She was tall and gaunt: one arm was thrown over her head, framing a heavy-jawed, livid face, with dull black eyes fixed on Catharine.

"Who are you?" she said.

Kitty went straight up to her. The foul smell made her head reel. But this was only a woman, after all; and one in great bodily need—dying, she thought. Kitty was a born nurse. She involuntarily straightened the wretched pillows

and touched the hot forehead before she spoke: "I came instead of Hugh Guinness. You had a message for him."

"I don't know. It doesn't matter for that," her eyes wandering. The soft touch and the kind face bending over her were more to her just now than all that had gone before in her life. "It is here the pain is," moving Kitty's hand to her side. The pain filled the dull eyes with tears. "This is a poor place to die in," trying to smile.

"Oh, you are not going to die," cheerfully. "Let me lift you up higher on the pillows. Put your arm about me—so. You're not too heavy for me to lift."

The woman, when she was arranged, took Kitty's fingers and feebly held them to her side. "It is so long since anybody took care of me. I shan't live till to-morrow. Don't leave me—don't go away."

"I'll not go away," said Kitty.

The man whom the prison physician had waited to meet was Doctor McCall. He had followed Kitty so far, unwilling to interfere by speaking to her. But when he saw her enter Moyamensing he thought that she needed a protector. "Ha, Pollard, is this you?" stopping to shake hands. They were old acquaintances, and managed, in spite of their profession, to see something of each other every year. McCall ran up to town once or twice through the winter, and stayed at Pollard's house, and Pollard managed to spend a week or two with him in peach season.

"I thought I knew your swing, McCall, two squares off. Looking for me?"

"No: I followed a lady, a friend of mine, who has just gone in at the gate."

"You know her, eh?" eagerly. "A most attractive little girl, I thought. She went in with the chaplain to see one of the prisoners."

McCall paused, his hand on the gate. A horrible doubt stopped his heart-beating for an instant. But how utterly absurd it was! Only because this black shadow pursued him always could such a fancy have come to him. "The pris-

oner is a woman?" with forced carelessness.

"Yes. A poor wretch brought here last spring for shoplifting. Her term's out next week. She has had a sharp attack of pneumonia, and has not much strength to bear it: she is a miserable wreck from opium-eating."

"Opium-eating? Can I go in?" said McCall.

"Certainly."

When the woman heard their steps on the corridor she said to Catharine, "I hear my husband coming now."

"That will be pleasant for you," kindly, wondering to herself what sort of a ruffian had chosen this creature for a mate and had the burden of her to carry.

"Yes, I know his step," turning dully to the door. It opened, and Hugh Guinness stood on the threshold.

He halted one brief moment. It seemed to Catharine that he was an older man than she had known him.

"It is you, then, Louise?" he said calmly, going up to the bed and looking down on her, his hands clasped, as usual, behind him.

"Yes, it is I. I thought you would like to see me and talk things over before I died, Hugh." She held out her hand, but he did not touch it. Looking at her a moment from head to foot as she lay in her unclean garments, he turned to where the other woman stood, a ray of light from the window shining on her fair hair and innocent face: "Do you know that I am Hugh Guinness, Kitty?"

"I knew that long ago."

"*This*," nodding down at the pallet, "is my wife. Now do you know why I could not go home to my father or to you?"

"God help us!" ejaculated Pollard. The next moment, remembering himself, he put his hand on McCall's shoulder: "I understand. When you were a boy, eh? Never mind: every man has his own trouble to carry."

"I've been a very real trouble to you, Hugh," whined Louise. "But I always loved you: I always meant to come back to you."

"When her later husbands had abandoned her." McCall laughed savagely, turning away.

She started up on the pallet, clenching her bony, dirty hands: "There were faults on both sides. I never would have been the woman I am if you had loved me. What will you do with me now?"

There was a dead silence in the cell, broken only by the heavy breathing of the woman. McCall stood dumb, looking first at Catharine and then at his wife.

"This is what he will do," said Kitty's clear, quiet tones. "You shall be washed and dressed, and taken home as his wife, to live or die as suits God's will."

"Never," muttered McCall.

"How soon can she leave this—this place?" she said, turning as if he had not spoken to Pollard.

"As soon as she is able to be moved. But," hesitating, with a doubtful look at McCall, "is that plan best?"

"Why, she's his wife!" with her innocent eyes wide. "He has no right to desert her. She will die if she is not properly cared for," turning to McCall.

"Do you stay with me: don't leave me," holding Kitty's sleeve. "If you would nurse me, I should get well."

"It is impossible that the lady should nurse you," said Pollard.

Kitty sat down: she began to tremble and turn white. "She has nobody but me. I'll stay," she said quietly.

McCall beckoned his fellow-physician out into the corridor.

"My dear fellow—" Pollard began.

"No: I know you sympathize with me. But we will not talk of this matter. Is that woman dying?"

"I'm afraid—that is, I think not. She is decidedly better to-day than she was last night. With care she may recover."

Kitty came out and stood with them in the corridor. McCall looked at her with amazement. The shy, silly school-girl, afraid to find her way about Berrytown, bore herself in this desperate juncture like the sagest of matrons.

"Is there no hospital to which she can be taken?" she said to Pollard.

"Yes, of course, of course."

"I'll go with her there, then. You know," laying her hand on McCall's arm, "you *did* marry her. You ought to try to help her poor body and soul as long as she lives."

"Would you have me take her as my wife again?"

"Not for an hour!" cried Kitty vehemently. She went into the cell, but came back in a moment: "Will you bring me some breakfast? I shall not be of much use here until it comes."

"She has more of the angel in her than any woman I ever knew," muttered McCall.

"She has a good deal of common sense, apparently," rejoined Pollard.

Kitty went with McCall's wife to the hospital, and helped to nurse her for a week. Pains and chills and nausea she could help, but for the deeper disease of soul, for the cure of which Kitty prayed on her knees, often with tears, there was little hope in her simple remedies, unless the cure and its evidence lay deep enough for only God's eye to see.

The woman's nature, of a low type at birth, had grown more brutal with every year of drunkenness and vice. She died at last, alone with Kitty.

"She said, the last thing, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'" Kitty told the chaplain. "But I am afraid she hardly understood the meaning."

"He understood, my dear child. We can leave her with Him. You must go home now: you have done all you could. Doctor McCall will go with you?"

"No, I shall go alone: I came alone."

"He will follow you home to Berrytown, then?" for the chaplain was but a man, and his curiosity was roused to know the exact relation between McCall and this old-fashioned, lovable girl.

Kitty hesitated: "I think he will come to Berrytown again. There is some business there which his wife's death will leave him free now to attend to."

She went to a sofa and sat down: "I shall be glad to be at home," beginning to cry. "I want to see father,"

"Broke down utterly," the chaplain

told his wife, "as soon as her terrible work was done."

As for Kitty, it seemed to her that her work in life and death was over for ever.

"You must come back," she said when McCall put her in the cars, looking like a ghost of herself. "Your father will be wanting to see you. And—and Maria."

"Maria? What the deuce is Maria to me?"

It was no ghost of Kitty that came home that evening. The shy, lively color came and went unceasingly, and her eyes sparkled.

"Poor Maria!" she whispered to her pillow as she went to bed—"poor Maria!"

CHAPTER XV.

It was a long time before he came. Months afterward, one evening when the express-train rushed into the dépôt, Catharine went down through the walnut trees into the garden. She stopped in the shadow as a man's figure crossed the fields. The air was cool—it was early spring. The clouds in the west threw the Book-house into shadow. Hugh Guinness, coming home, could see the narrow-paned windows twinkling behind the walnut boughs. It was just as he had left it when he was a boy. There was the cow thrusting her head through a break in the fence he had made himself; the yellow-billed ducks quacked about the pond he had dug in the barnyard; the row of lilacs by the orchard fence were just in blossom: they were always the latest on the farm, he remembered. He saw Kitty, like the heart of his old home, waiting for him. Her white dress and the hair pushed back from her face gave her an appearance of curious gentleness and delicacy.

When he came to her he took both her hands in his.

"You will come to your father now?" she said, frightened and pale.

They walked side by side down the thick rows of young saplings. There was a cool bank overgrown with trumpet-creeper. Inside, he caught sight of a

little recess or cave, and a gray old bench on which was just room for two.

"Will you stop here and sit down one moment?" she said.

It was nothing to him but a deserted spring-house. It was the one enchanted spot of Kitty's life.

Half an hour afterward they found old Peter playing on his violin at the doorstep. Kitty had often planned an effective bringing back of Hugh to him, but she forgot it all, and creeping up put her hands about his neck. "Father! look there, father!" she whispered.

The Book-house still stands among its walnuts in Berrytown. But a shrewd young fellow from New York has charge of it now, who deals principally in school-books and publications relative to Reforms and raspberries. Old Peter Guinness still holds an interest in it, although his chief business is that of special agent for libraries in buying rare books and pamphlets. He comes down for two or three weeks in winter to look into matters. But since his wife died he makes his home in Delaware with his son, who married, as all Berrytown knows, Kitty Vogdes after she behaved so shamefully to Mr. Muller.

Mrs. Guinness died in high good-humor with her son-in-law. "Doctor McCall," she assured her neighbors, "was exactly the man she should have chosen for Catharine. She had known him from a boy, and knew that his high social position and wealth were only his deserts. A member—vestryman indeed—of St. Luke's Church, the largest in Sussex county."



The farm-people in the sleepy, sunny Delaware neighborhood have elected Kitty a chief favorite. "A gentle, good-natured little woman, with no opinions of her own. A bit too fond of dress perhaps, and a silly, doting mother, but the most neighborly, lovable creature alive, after all."

Miss Muller was down in St. George's lecturing last fall, and made her mark, as she always does. But the Guinness men were now hopelessly conservative. She made her home with Kitty.

"A fine woman," old Peter said the morning after she was gone.

"Never knew a woman with a finer mind," said Hugh. "Nor many men."

"She nurses that dog as if it were a baby," said Kitty sharply. "It's silly! It's disgusting!"

Peter twanged his bow on the porch, looking down over the great farm-slopes stretching away in the morning light.

"We have everything to make life good to us, Hugh," he said after Kitty had gone. "And the best thing, to my notion, is an old-fashioned woman in the house, with no notion of ruling, like that Muller girl and her set."

Hugh was romping with his boy: "Do you know your first business in this world, sir? To take care of your mother," glancing at the garden, where Kitty, in her pretty white dress, was clipping chrysanthemums.

She rules him and the house and their lives absolutely, with but little regard for justice. But he has never suspected it. She hardly knows herself that she does it.



LEONARD HEATH'S FORTUNE.

By REBECCA HARDING DAVIS.

CHAPTER I.

IN the northern suburb of Philadelphia there is a curious crooked lane. It lies westward of the old Camac Woods which so lately suffered dreary transmigration into a crop of red and white contract-houses.

This lane has always been a most unchangeable, unwakenable bit of antiquity. It was an Indian trail, through old beech and ash trees, dropping their rotting leaves on the lush mould, with fat green caterpillars spinning cocoons under their roots, when the first Swedish settlers landed and began to dig their underground houses down there at Wicaco: the rotted leaves lie just as then about the ash and beech trees to-day, and the butterflies crawl from the cocoons and flap their gold-dusted wings on the bark, as though one of the great cities of the world had not sprung up between their roots and Wicaco.

Nature gives up this old landmark grudgingly. On one side of the lane the country struggles to be town by means of brick-kilns and Sommergärtens, while next to them is an old-fashioned cemetery, where the tired dead townspeople seem to have gone out to lie down and dream that they were in the

country. Running along the whole of the other side is a dilapidated fence, made in some long-ago generation, with faded notices to trespassers nailed on its green and rotting rails. Within is the Fontaine Place—a house gone to decay, and woodland.

I do not know how much woodland there is in the Fontaine Place.

There is a vague tradition of a mythical man in Paris or Vienna who pays taxes for it, and doubtless thinks it belongs to him. If such a man there be, he may have a paper map of it, and the number of acres on the margin. But if you were one of the real flesh-and-blood people who do own it—the boys who go nutting there in the fall, or the two or three men and women with vagabond blood in their veins who escape from the red and white contract-houses, and creep through gaps in the fence when the wet spider-webs glisten on the thistles in the morning, or the squirrels scratch and scud up the trees at nightfall—you would know that there was some mysterious hindrance in the way of measuring your possessions.

You go there in hope of certain loot, not to be weighed in any scale, and of no appreciable value in the town yon-

der. It comes to you (unlike any other treasure) unlooked for. You have nothing more to do than to sit knee-deep in the seed grass, while you idly scrape the silver and black crust of lichen from the old stump beside you, or watch the water oozing from the spring and curdling blood-red about the willow roots, or the leaves overhead photographing ghosts of leaves on the next gray trunks.

But presently you find the grass slopes and the dusky trees have stretched and stretched until they fill all the real world to you. The business and household cares of yesterday have faded away into some far-away, unreal country. You have found the enchanted ground where the Pilgrim fell asleep and lost the chart which was to guide him through the world. Surely, that distant rumbling is the wind among the hills where you were born, which you have not seen for many years: this stream at your feet, you know, plunges yonder, where it turns out of sight for ever, into some realm of deeper peace and silence.

Who said that money was of weight in the world? Knowledge? or fashion? or power?

Is not *this* the business of life? To lie in the sun, to watch the shadow of the clouds drift, drift all day long over the yellowed pastures, to hear the bee hum in and out of the warm moss? What is this eternal incommunicable meaning of the drifting cloud, of the wind in the tree-tops, of the cricket's chirp in the burned grass? It is a language which you know, and know not; yet it was yours, you think, once, in some old forgotten day, when money or cares or love were not yet for you. The message struggles vainly now to reach you, as words learned by heart in your childhood sometimes haunt you, which the next moment may bring back altogether clear.

But that next moment never comes for this message. Never. These words once known by heart are never clear again.

At last you rise and go home; and when you are back in the contract-

houses, in the middle of the network of sewers and gas-pipes, with butcher and baker and friend and critic pushing in on every side, a thousand actual other lives pressing on and narrowing your daily path, then the enchanted ground where you had wellnigh lost your map of life becomes nothing but the Fontaine woods on the other side of Turner's lane. You suspect that the sound you heard was not the wind in a mountain gorge, but the Germantown train crossing a bridge; and the bubbling stream most likely empties into a culvert. The unbounded world of sunshine and water, and shadow-haunted by mysterious meanings, shrinks into a fine bit of timber-land, which you wonder the lumbermen have not seized on before now. Or perhaps you suspect that it was a dream altogether, and are afraid to go and look, lest on that other side of the lane you find brick-kilns also, or a graveyard.

So it is that no one can tell how many acres there are in the Fontaine Place.

But there is an old legend about these woods which when unearthed is a real and certain matter, though it has a musty flavor of meaning about it akin to that which comes so close to you as you lie on the ground.

The homestead, of which you catch glimpses through the trees, was twenty years ago almost as much decayed as now. A mellow afternoon sun, one October day, lighted up its front of dull red brick and worm-eaten porches, on one of which two young men stood together, coarsely dressed as laborers. They had been sauntering through the woods for an hour or two. One of them—a squat, square-built fellow, with his face deeply pitted by small-pox—had, boy-like, stuffed out his pockets with nuts and queer bits of mica, and was kneeling tying up a bundle of mint in his handkerchief, whistling as he did it. The other held his hands folded behind him, dangling a pair of worn kid gloves, and looked dreamily down the dusky wood-aisles.

"In a few years, Joe," he said, "the city will have crept out here: it will

bring up the value of this property to the estate of a prince."

"Likely; though it 'ud be a pity to see chimneys in place of them elms, Leonard."

Leonard glanced slightly down at him: "You don't feel this place your own as I do. It is our inheritance to me, in spite of all the Fontaines alive. You don't seem to understand that it was men of our blood who took this ground from the red man. The Heaths lived here before the Revolution like nobles: they had a place among men. And you and I, the last of the Heaths, are thanking God to-day for the chance of partnership in a blacksmith's shop!"

"Hibbin's offer is very fair, Len, as to the shop—very fair, considerin' we never learned the trade regularly." Joe got up, adjusting his glazed cap. He showed his white teeth and stuttered a little: it often happened when he talked to Leonard, though this embarrassment was the only painful way in which he showed his humility and sense of inferiority to his brother. "As to this property, it's done me good to see it even this once. I'll respect myself more for coming of a stock of men that was educated and fit to rule. You're born more of their sort, and it costs you more to lose their footing, I suppose. But I wish you'd see that the shop—"

"Don't talk of the shop *here*, for God's sake!" Leonard reddened to the roots of his hair, like a girl. His face was not unlike a girl's, with large, sparkling eyes.

"Very well"—good-naturedly—"only you were talking of a place in the world."

"That a place! Work in soot and sweat by day, and then to sleep like a log by night. It's the life of a beast more than a man's."

"Don't let Winny hear you talk like that, or she'll think you rue. Why, it was only last week you were arguing how safe it was for her and you to marry on the profits Hibbin promised. Look here, Len"—touching him on the arm, his tone growing grave—"I don't relish soot or sweat any more than you do. But blacksmithing *is* a place. It's

footing. Now that I've got a hammer in my hand, and Bess in that room for my wife, I'm a man among men. Do you see? It'll go hard with me if I don't make my place wider. I don't mean to be a blacksmith always. It'll go hard with me if my children don't have the education I lack—and a home like this to grow up in, p'r'aps. Who knows?"

Leonard patted Joe's broad back, looking down affectionately at the set bull-dog jaws and steady, small black eyes: "You start wrong. A man is a traitor to himself who takes up other work than the best for which he is fitted. If God has created him a poet, he should starve before he degrades his faculty in a carpenter's shop. His first duty is to his best self."

"But if circumstances is ag'in him, Leonard? Now I don't really see any opening for you but Hibbin's." Leonard made no answer. "There was One, too, who worked, they say, in a carpenter's shop till His time was come for His real work; and it seems to me there's a sermon in that, to us that has to wait our chance, as great as any He preached afterward."

Leonard smiled loftily: "Well, do you go back to Hibbin's and wait, Joe. I'll help you. You'll waken out of that shop into the inheritance of a noble, some day. A noble!"

"All right"—swinging his bundle over his shoulder. "It's time for the train now: we'd better get home and to bed betimes, so as to be at the shop early."

"Go on: I'll follow you directly." While he leaned over the porch-railings watching Joe's broad figure crossing the sunny lawn, the blacksmith muttered half aloud to himself:

"What cursed bee is in his bonnet now? He said 'the fortune of a noble,' and then he gave a vexed, indulgent laugh. His patience was boundless with poor visionary Len, but this tried it hard. Joe was the younger of the two, but his brilliant brother (as he deemed him) had been a dead weight on his broad shoulders all of his life, since the days he ran off from the little

public school to hang around old book-stalls. There he had picked up certain language and scraps of theories which were Greek to Joe. It had been the result of months of plotting on his part to induce Hibbin to include the flighty fellow in the offer of partnership with himself: he thought he had him settled for life. "And now," he groaned, "he's going to fly the track before he's begun on it."

As for Leonard, his heart ached looking after his brother. After to-day their paths separated, God only knows for how long. He gave himself a mental hug, thinking how good a brother he had been—how self-sacrificing. Had he not made plans for Joe all his life which that dull fellow never could have projected? When they were boys it was Joe who should command the pirate ship of which he would be but bo'sen: it was Joe who should be chief of the gallant band that, following Burr's scheme, were to conquer some unknown territory in New Mexico, and set up a kingdom among the prairie-dogs and buffaloes and gigantic red cacti. Joe was to wear the plumed cap there, be Inca, caliph—what not? "I always took the second place. When I ran off to California it was to dig for gold for him. It was no fault of mine that I failed and that he took his wages to bring me back. I've been a good brother to Joe Heath." He repeated this again and again, walking up and down, strengthening himself in some way by it. "It's for his sake and for Winny's sake that I'll break loose from them to-day. I'll make this venture, and throw away every other chance. For them. Not for myself, God knows!"

When the wind grew chilly and the shadows of the Lombardy poplars fell heavily aslant the darkening porch, he went inside.

It was an old, unpicturesque room. Unmeaning monotony even at its early day of building had fallen on Philadelphia houses. The ceilings were high, the many windows almost flush with the flat walls. Paneling and doors, once a raw, shiny white, were now yellow and

streaked with mould. The papering flapped mildewed from the wall.

Leonard dragged in a log from the lawn and seated himself on it in the middle of the bare floor.

Night was falling, when a hasty step rung through the vacant rooms, and a man pushed open the door behind him. A little man, in clothes of glossy brown, that bagged about his lean limbs; a peering skinny face, thatched over by a curly black wig; heavy gold seals dangling below his waistcoat.

"Mooning in the dark, Heath? No fire? A little blaze and a hot drink would have put a different face on matters. You Americans think of nothing but business—business."

"I came here for business."

"Well, then, to it at once," putting down a tin lantern on the floor, and opening the bull's eye. A broad bar of light fell across their faces into the dark room. "The sooner out of this damp the better. And I have no time to lose: I must be in Liverpool by the ninth. If you refuse my offer, I must look up another tenant for the Fontaine house to-morrow. Tch-h! It is enough to freeze one's marrow," sneezing and his teeth chattering.

"I've been thinking it over," said Leonard, in his dreamy way, leisurely clasping his hands about his knees and speculatively regarding the lantern. "I wish you would just run over the facts again, Mr. Ludlow, to make it all clear. My brain is muddled to-night."

"You'd better look sharp, then, for the explanation will be of the shortest," getting up, stamping his feet, and trotting up and down, to work off his impatience and cold together. "This place, by old Fontaine's will, is to lie unimproved until the heir is of age. I am the agent. I came to find a tenant who is to keep it from going to actual ruin. So far you understand?"

Leonard nodded, with a twinkle in his soft eyes. He was suspicious, like most credulous women and womanish men: he was never again to be tricked as he had so often been before: he regarded his eyes as washed keen by bit-

ter experience. This request to hear the story again was but a subtle feint to test the Englishman. So the poor dreamy fool sat blinking solemnly, as blind as an owl in daylight, while Ludlow laughed secretly to find him a tool fashioned so ready for use.

"The Fontaines have held the property, as you know, but for a short time."

"I know. We bought it from the Indians," said Len, sitting erect.

"Bought or stole—what matter? Here is the point: it was but a younger branch of the Heaths that came to the States. Edward, the first to emigrate, brought with him title-deeds to a large tract of waste ground near Liverpool, on which he and his descendants paid taxes by their agents. The Heaths, as you know, during the rebellion of the colonies, were Tories. John Heath, the owner of this ground here, went to France at the beginning of the troubles, and remained abroad for many years, leaving the house in charge of a house-keeper. He married a French girl of family, and died suddenly in Lyons. About the same time the homestead here was burned to the ground. When the war was over his widow, with her infant son, came to Philadelphia and made search, secretly, for certain valuable plate and papers, which she affirmed had been hidden in an underground vault somewhere on this property. Among them were the title-deeds to the Liverpool ground. Whether she had mistaken her husband as to the precise spot, or whether the falling ruins had completely blocked up the entrance, I don't know. But I do know that neither plate nor papers were ever found, and that they are here now. Probably under our feet."

"Probably under our feet!" muttered Len, with a long breath.

"You know the story of the Heaths after that better than I do. How they have gone down, down, for lack of money, until the old stock has ended in—"

"A blacksmith's shop."

"In two young men, one of whom has strength enough to bring back all

the fortune of his race," eyeing him shrewdly.

"Yes!" standing up. His hollow cheeks burned: "You do not deceive yourself in Leonard Heath."

"I hope not. I propose that you undertake this search as quietly as may be. I would not trust even your brother with the secret."

"Certainly I shall not trust Joe. There would be no surprise in that case. I'll disappear out of their sight. They shall think me dead—Winny and all. Some day I'll come back and bring the keys of fairy-land. I'll shower gold on them."

"There's no doubt of it," taking snuff. "Your first aim must be the title-deeds. Remember."

"The ground is some of the most valuable in Liverpool, you say?"

"No, but it has great value. It is closely built over with dwelling-houses, owned generally by their occupants. That class of people will be more readily ousted than large corporations would have been."

"But"—Leonard stood up, shocked and startled—"if I succeed, Ludlow, these people will be homeless."

"Hundreds of them. The more the better for you. That's their business. What right had the cursed beggars or their grandfathers to squat on your ground?"

"That's true—that's true!"

"You are homeless. If you can afford to give away your property to them, it's a sort of generosity I can't appreciate."

"I don't mean to give it away. And yet—these men probably paid hard money or labor for that ground, and thought they bought it honestly, while I never heard of it till last week. It looks like wholesale robbery!" He spoke with a sort of gusty vehemence which evaporated with the words. The Englishman's cool sneer cowed him. He ended with a feeble, "What do you think, eh?"

"I don't understand such genteel sentiments. I'm a business man, I am. You throw the venture up, then?"

"By no means. It was only a passing idea of mine. We owe you too much for discovering the facts to throw them up now. By the way, we will reward you handsomely, Mr. Ludlow. You may depend on Joe and me."

"I'll take one-third as my price when the claim is established," dryly.

"You'll take—one-third?" his jaw falling.

"Yes. The finding of the deeds is but a beginning. My work begins then. You blacksmith boys could as easily set the machinery of English law in motion as you could work a steam engine by the breath of your mouth."

"I suppose that's true"—stroking his thin whiskers vaguely.

"You'll find how true when you try to work without me. You'll make the venture then?"—picking up his lantern.

"Yes: I will be here to-morrow night."

Leonard got up, looking around him into the damp shadows. "I will not leave this house until I have dragged my luck out of it. Other men kneel and pray to Fortune, but I mean to take her by the throat: hey, Ludlow?"

"By the throat, eh? To be sure—the throat. Well, I'm for some punch now: will you come? No? To-morrow night, then, we'll oust the infernal beggars. The throat, eh?"—with an approving nod and chuckle.

CHAPTER II.

"JUST call them off, uncle, will you?"

Ben stumped on his wooden leg across the kitchen for his spectacles and a slip of paper, then back again, turn about, right face, into position behind the clean-skinned, roly-poly little girl who, with her hands rolled up in her gingham apron, was tip-toeing and clucking about before the little plaster busts on the dresser, like a fussy hen over her first nestful of white eggs.

"Four Virgin Marys; ditto dogs with basket; one Fellora; two Bacchuses; two Doubtfuls: what's that, Winifred?"

"Spoiled in the baking: they go in as Doubtfuls. Seppy gets rid of them as

Jupiters or George Washingtons, according as customers run. How had we better set them out, uncle? Leonard'll come in at that door"—snuffing the candles anxiously.

"I'd advise a semy-circle, so as to give him the full view at wunst."

"I wish you'd help."

"Kin I? I'll be very keeful, Winny"—quite in a glow of pleasure, pulling himself up on his sound leg and rolling up his sleeves before he began work. Their Pantheon quite filled the lower shelf of the dresser, the dishes being piled on top to make way for the gods and heroes. A tallow candle was set at either end to complete the effect. Winny drew back, put her hands behind her and her head deliberately on one side. Suddenly she grew red as a coal:

"You see that? Don't deny it, Uncle Ben. I knew I made the oven too hot. That's scorch."

Ben looked closely at the plaster and then at her, rubbing the wisp of gray hair on his bald crown. Then he broke into a laugh:

"All the better: that gives them a look of age, that scorch does."

"Well, I did not think of that"—thoughtfully.

"Well, I did. I never seen finer works of art than that en-tire row of Virgin Marys. Take my judgment for it: I'm older than you, Winifred."

"I think they are well done"—with a complacent nod. "Dear, dear! eight o'clock and Leonard not here! The muffins will be quite over the pan—and he's a terrible fellow for muffins."

Ben dusted the plaster from his scuffed coat, buttoned it, combed out his thin gray whiskers, and sat down, erect as a flagstaff, on the side of the fire. It was a little three-cornered room, Winny's kitchen, with rows of tins, and strings of brown onions and scarlet peppers along the white wall. On one side was the door to Uncle Ben's room—on the other, the door to hers. The supper-table was set, the muffin-rings waiting, the sausages ready to fry. She hurried in to straighten her collar and tie again

the ribbon in her soft brown hair, and when she had hurried out again she could think of nothing else to do, or wish for that night or for the rest of her life. Leonard was coming: in a week this would be his home!

Uncle Ben, who was very skillful at carving, had made a dog's-head wooden knocker for the door, with "Heath" coming out of the mouth. It was his little joke to greet them when they came back from church on their wedding-day.

There was a scuffling of feet scraping the mud off at the door presently, and Joe and his wife Bessy came in "just to see the busts set out. No, they wouldn't stay: they wouldn't spoil Len's surprise. But was there ever a girl as handy as Winny?" And although they had been in the secret all along since the day that the Italian boy Seppy began to show Winny how to mix the clay, and had both sat breathless over the oven while Pagan gods and Christian saints baked harmoniously together, they went over them all again, admiring even Flora's snub nose and an unfortunate leer in the eyes of St. Paul.

"There's some very life-like touches ther, Winny," said Joe, critically. "You've give them the look of people I've knowed. It's good work."

"It's genius, is what I'd call it," ejaculated Uncle Ben.

"I'm sure I don't care for myself," said Winny. "I don't know now as Leonard would like to marry a genius. But this is what I think of, Joe"—putting her fat hand on his shoulders. "It'll be very pleasant for me, when he's hammering in the shop yonder, to have my paddle in the cellar here, and help keep the wolf from the door with it. Of course, if I've got the genius, so much the better"—her dimpling face growing pink. "But even as it is, the plasters pay three times as much as slop-work."

"Ah, now you talk to the point!" cried Mrs. Joe. "When you've been married as long as I have, you'll learn to count the pennies. Genius is good in its way, but it's poor stuff to make the pot boil, or to put turnips in it!"

"It's you for hard sense, Bess!" Joe nodded significantly to the others. There was a moment's respectful silence, for by dint of the daily firing of such hard, bullety maxims among them, Mrs. Joe had begun to be a power in the family, and was regarded as holding the tight rein of common sense over the Heath affairs in general, though there was really as much firmness in the fair, pudgy little woman as in a bowlful of sweet jelly.

"Here's Len!" cried Joe, as a quick, uncertain step rattled on the board walk without. "Let's be off, Bess. We won't spoil Winny's plans"—hurrying her to the door, while she and Winny pecked kisses at each other, and chatted about Bess's baby's colic to the last breath, after the manner of women. "Hillo, Len!"—giving him a pound on the back as he passed them in the narrow path. "Been maundering about that murtly old house till now, thinking of the glory of the Heaths, eh? Be early at the shop in the morning, mind."

"Joe?" after they had gone on a rod or two.

"Yes."

"Good-bye!"—holding out his hand.

"Good-bye. Why, what ails you? Your hand's as dry and hot as punk. Not a touch of your chills back, hey?"—dragging him to the light, anxiously.

"Nothing ails me," peevishly. "Good-bye, Elizabeth. You've been good and kind to me since you were Joe's wife. I'll not forget it. Your bread shall return to you from the waters. The Heaths were never ungrateful."

"I'm sure of that, Lenny. But I don't want my bread back."

He stood still, pressing both their hands. "I wish—I feel terribly alone," he said. "No matter. The old knights went out alone, and came back victors."

"You'd better go in and eat Winny's muffins," said Joe, shortly.

"Good-night, Joe. Some day you will better understand me."

"Poor Winny! What with the ague and laziness, Len's tempers is growin' more than flesh and blood can stand," said Mrs. Joe, as they walked on.

"You're generally just to him, Bess. He's a real genius, Leonard is: he can't be judged by our rules. And there's a sort of spell about that house, there's no denyin' it. If the shop turns out well, we'll move into town ourselves in a few years, and go live near it. We Heaths hev a right to that much."

The will-o'-the-wisp, which was leading Len into the swamp, had so much delusive glitter, even in the solid black-smith's eyes.

"It's nothing but the ague workin' with him, I doubt," said Bess, going back to Len.

Leonard was inside of the kitchen by this time; the grand tableau had been presented: the Flora and Bacchus, and the Virgins with the mellowing scorch, and the tallow candles burning away at either end. Uncle Ben had been hurrying out, hearing him coming, but Winny had stopped him. "I'll be in the way, little gal."

"You worked as hard as I. You must see his very first look." So the old fellow gathered himself into a corner with a chuckle of enjoyment.

She forgot to speak to Len—stood breathless, watching his face, her palms pressed hard together.

Now Len, coming from the city in the train and plodding along the board walk outside, had built and furnished the solidest of all his castles in the air. It was for Winny. There were onyx stones and gopher wood in it, for aught I know. There were delicate perfumes: the air moved in music, the sunshine came to it stained with gold and royal purple. In a little while this would be their home.

Here, there was a smell of sausages; the candles sputtered; the dresser was crammed with dirty-looking plaster figures, such as that greasy Seppy peddled about the roads.

Len drew a long breath. "What is this trumpety?" he said, in a savage growl. "Throw a cloth over them, for God's sake, Winny, and open the window. It is terrible for human beings to be forced to cook and live in the

same room." Then he remembered to draw her to his side and kiss her.

Winny's temper, which, when she was a baby, used to be strong enough to shake every atom of her little body, choked in her throat now and burned fiery red in her cheeks. But she loved this fellow enough to bear blows from him, and kiss him after them. "You don't understand, Leonard: I made them. It is a surprise for you. Seppy will sell them for me. Only think how much we can make for you in a year! You in the shop, and I in the cellar."

"Don't talk to me of the shop. You drive me mad, Winifred. You know how I always loathed—"

"Work, dear?" when he could not find a word.

"No. Sit down. You at least must understand me." Uncle Ben, who had been edging his way, crutch and all, to the door, noiseless as a cat, stopped, holding it open, to wink and telegraph encouragingly to her behind Leonard's back. "It's tantrums, nothin' but tantrums," opening and shutting his wide mouth without a sound. "We men hev all got 'em at times. Don't you mind, deary;" and disappeared, to stomp up and down the boards, shaking his head gloomily. Winny did not sit down. She began to gather her poor little figures into her apron, crumbling them to pieces as she threw them in. When Leonard saw how pale was her usually jolly little face, and how she held back the tears, he broke into uneasy accusations against himself.

"I'm a brute," he cried. "But it galls me to see you degraded. Come here, child. Think how your beauty is wasted drudging in this back alley."

"Didn't it make you love me, Leonard?" looking up sideways.

"Yes. But I am wasted," with a passionate outbreak. "There is no reason why I should not stand as high as any Heath that went before me. I am a gentleman by right of blood and body and soul. Look at the place they had in the world. I am trampled under foot. For what? For want of money—money!"

Then Winny threw down her plaster rubbish and went to him. She had a sudden perception of the imminence of the danger. The old Leonard was going from her, from them all, for ever. She put up her hands on his shoulders. This was no vagary of a moment that could so alter this whole outward man. She had no time to sob or cry out. She tried to think of what strongest words to say: "You have your trade. No Heath of them all had your intellect." His eyes glistened at that. "There is no reason why you should not be respected. And then you have—me," dropping her head so that he could hold it to his breast, as he would do if love was all in all to him, as it was to the little woman.

But he did not. "Oh, I've no doubt I have all the materials of a good life, if I had money. But without—it is like that lamp without a light in it."

Winny lifted her head quickly. "So the light is not in it without money?" she said slowly. "I thought—" But what she thought she never told. Winny had no gift of tragic expression. She had said her little word of remonstrance, and was done with outcry now and for ever. She went directly to her work, colder and paler than she had ever been seen before.

"Will you have your supper now?" she said, gently, after a while rapping at the window for Uncle Ben, who came in with a vehement glow of cheerfulness, told one or two roaring campaign stories and forgot to laugh at them himself, praised the supper, while his dim eyes wandered piteously from one unanswering young face to the other. The supper was over. Winny, like most strong-nerved women, usually worked off inward fever by hot action of her body. In a few minutes the room was clean, the hearth swept and an arm-chair, the leather worn and shiny with old age, pulled up in front of the fire. She stood beside it and glanced at Leonard. But he loitered apart by the open door.

The sergeant got up, turned his back to the fire, took off his rusty wig, and, poisoning it on his fist, brushed it care-

fully—a ceremony which always with the old fellow ushered in an important act. "I want to say a word to you, little gal," solemnly, "and to you, Leonard. It's about this day week—your weddin'-day."

The woman's face glowed with fiery blushes, but Leonard was silent. She raised her eyes at that and looked at him steadily.

The sergeant pulled her toward him, clearing his throat and beginning with renewed cheerfulness: "We've been partners a good many years, Winny—since you was up to my knee, about—but I think this day week it'll be time to part company."

She did not answer him by word or look. Her eyes never left the man's face, which stood out in relief against the dark background of the night without, as though she read in its words which made her deaf to all others.

"It's borne in on me to-day, Winny, that I ought to go," in a voice which he made unnaturally jovial. "A man and his new wife is best alone: a third party is like water spilled on a hot, fresh-jined pair of shears—it spiles the temper of 'em ever after. Besides, you and Leonard is goin' to hev a hard fight for it. My bit of a pension'd be little help."

Without looking at him she pulled his wrinkled yellow hand under her arm and held it tight on her breast. "Your pension kept me from the almshouse, Uncle Ben. No husband can ever come between me and you."

"It was only the want of money I thought of—" She knew then that he had overheard some of Leonard's words.

"Are you going to measure out life by dollars?" she cried. "Is money above love with you all?" The old man was silent, knowing the words were meant for Leonard. But Leonard did not speak. She was unjust and bitter, he thought, like all women. What if he deferred his marriage for this chance of a fortune? It would be but for a month or a year. Or if, to be plain about it, he did, as she chose to put it, rate money higher than love? He was a practical man; he knew how he had been worst-

ed and trampled on always for want of money; he had his chance now. Was he to give it up for a woman's kiss? Joe, and Winny, too, no doubt, would call it a damnable thing to rob hundreds of poor men of their homes on the strength of a musty parchment. He was a practical man. He saw things in a business light. It was for their sake he did it—not his own.

Ben was stroking her hair: "I knowed *you'd* wish me to stay, Winny. But—"

He looked at Heath, who hesitated a moment and then came forward, leaning his hand on a chair back: "Sergeant Porter, you'll never leave your niece by my will. I do not forget what she owes you. Some day I hope to repay her great obligations in a way that—that may surprise you, sir." There was a boyish choke in his voice at the word.

"I'd be sorry if you paid me in any way, Leonard," the sergeant said, gently. He loosed his hand and slipped quietly to his own room. He felt he had no right to be there with these young people, who stood looking at each other, holding their lives in their hands. He had the feeling of an intruder who had jostled into a room where some one—a stranger—lay dying.

The firelight flashed pleasantly about the homely little kitchen and about the girl: it seemed to show Leonard his honest place among men—work and love. It was a real life so far as it went. It drew him with a strange strength from the mildewed house. The house behind which was—what?

Under all his fantastic ambitions, Len Heath was naturally a kind-hearted, affectionate fellow; besides, his imagination was at work: the tenants of the Liverpool property were already real to him—sturdy mill-men, pale sewing-women, little children from whom he was going to filch their one chance in the world: he could hear the very words with which they would curse him when he brought out the musty parchment that left them beggared and homeless.

But behind the musty parchment, for him, was—*money*.

Winny fancied she saw a flicker of his

old boyish, frank smile: her own face glowed in an instant under it: "Here is your place, Leonard"—timidly turning the comfortable chair about a little.

How sweet and sufficing she looked in her pretty housewife's dress, the hair pushed back from her decided little face! Her big dark eyes, soft, unreasoning, protesting against pain as a deer's, followed him as he moved uneasily about. They haunted Leonard Heath for years.

"Winny," he said, avoiding them guiltily, "I am going to leave you for a week, or a month perhaps—not longer."

She said nothing. How could she struggle against this unknown power which was drawing him away? But she knew by instinct that it was taking him away from her, and that for ever.

"I am going to find a certain thing: it is for your benefit—yours and Joe's. You are not hurt at me? You say nothing"—sharply. "It is not for myself: God knows I am not selfish."

"No, you are not selfish, Leonard. But—you do not find enough—*here*?"

"No. There! we will not talk of it. You never understood all the requirements of my nature—none of you: you never will." He took up his cap and shifted it irresolutely in his hand.

"Will you be gone long, Leonard?"

"No. If I do not succeed in my search in a month, I will come back to you. You'll keep my place there ready for me?" with a smile.

Her face brightened: "I'll keep it for you"—putting her hand on the chair. "Are you going now?"

"Yes, now." He took a step nearer. But he knew if he kissed the warm, sweet-breathed mouth, or touched her, he never would leave her. He stood motionless a moment, and then, with a sudden gesture of farewell, went out into the night.

CHAPTER III.

"AND that's Joseph, eh? But there was another Heath, sergeant—a younger lad, if I'm not mistaken?"

Uncle Ben glanced warily about the little eating-house, hauled up his wooden leg and bent over his glass of ale to reach the corporal's ear. The room was vacant but for themselves, and Tiffin was a trusty fellow; they had been comrades at Palo Alto and Vera Cruz: still, it was as well to be cautious. He keyed his whisper to the lowest pitch.

Tiffin sat upright again with a long-drawn "Whew! Now I've heerd of cases like that," he rejoined, solemnly nodding. "But I can't say as one ever come before into my actual experience. I've heerd before of men disappearin' off the face of the earth in broad daylight, with their friends about them: Death put out his hand and took 'em onseon, I reckon. That's more awful to me than to see them going the usual road—first corpses and then crumblin' bones. And there's been no word of him sence?"

"No, none; and that is five year ago—five year this October since he went out of the door, as it might be there, saying, 'I'm going to bring something to you—to you and Joe.' Leonard 'ud hev brought it if he'd been alive. He'd hev sent tidin's, if it was his last breath, to one of them as waited for him. I hed faith in the boy," shaking his head.

"The police, now—I reckon you tried them? People allus do;" with a nod as one who knew human weakness and could pardon it.

"Of course. Wouldn't you have recommended it, Tiffin?"

"They found no traces, I'll venture?"

"No. They sarched all likely and unlikely places. And Joe—for more nor a year he let his business go by the board. I did what I could, but it was of no use."

"Ther was one, you said, he would have sent tidin's to?"

"She's ther. She's waitin' for him yet to keep his promise. I'd rather not talk about her." Ben was silent for a moment, and then resumed in an altered tone: "Ther was one clue. Ther was an oldish, wizened-lookin' man, that Leonard had been seen with in the city a day or two before: sarch was

made for him, but he never was seen afterward. Ther was them as said he hed made way with the boy."

"I hev'n't a doubt of it. I hev my own opinion about these onaccountable disappearances"—draining his glass with a mysterious nod. "When ther's common robbery it comes out, an' when ther's common murder it comes out. But when old Death puts on human shape an' goes about layin' on his hand, now here, now there, them he touches vanishes in daylight, an' ther's nothin' heerd of them again. You heerd of that strange man that was seen goin' from town to town in '32, and the cholery follered him like a bloodhound its master?"

"No," with a shiver. "Then you think—"

"How do you know that the man seen with young Heath *was* a man?"

Tiffin's views were dreary and chilly, even over a bottle of double XX and the savoriest of fried oysters. Ben lagged in his talk, and presently stooped for his stick, leaving his supper to grow cold, and bade the corporal good-night. Winny would be waiting for him, he knew.

They had been living for only a week in town, and this was the sergeant's first onslaught into the dissipation of city life. He stumped along the narrow streets in the suburb into the unfrequented road leading to the low, red brick house, with its half dozen porches, whose windows were sending a cheerful glimmer from the top of the hill. That was Joe's house. Just a week ago he and Bessy had carried out their old scheme, and had moved into the outskirts of Philadelphia, buying this farmhouse and its two or three acres round about. Not a stone's throw off, in the orchard, there was the stone cottage into which Winny and Uncle Ben had snuggled down with their old furniture and big fires and plaster busts and simple, hearty, old-fashioned ways that made a home out of the place in a day.

It was a matter of course that they should come with Joe and Bessy, who had drawn them closer to them by de-

grees, for years trying to fill up the gap in the girl's life with their own home-affairs, their children, their watchful love of her. The first plan was that the sergeant and Winny should share the house with them, but Winny rebelled. "We must have room for our plaster-work, Uncle Ben and I," she said; "and room for our sober, humdrum ways. It would not be best for us to live with you, Bessy."

So, with her savings (for the paddle had kept the wolf clear out of sight), she bought this cottage: a joint-stock concern with her and Ben. He had been at work for weeks, patching fences, painting every bit of wood susceptible of paint, to the very cowshed. To-day the last triumphant nail had been driven. Winny had put down her green rag-carpet, and tacked her last curtain, and Joe and Bessy were coming over for a housewarming tea.

Ben stumped along the board walk, whistling cheerily, his old heart beating time under his thin ribs. He had gone to town for some pepper-pot, as a delicate surprise to add to the entertainment, when he fell in with Tiffin, and was beguiled into the ghostly story of Leonard Heath. He jogged on faster to put it out of his mind. It was more ghastly than death to remember. There were times when he fancied it was always present to Winny, though, even to him, for years she had not mentioned Leonard's name.

He saw her now in the open door, through which the firelight streamed out warmly into the night. "All right, Winny!" he called. At which she nodded brightly, and went in.

"There's none kin fill the old man's place to her," he said, as he made a short cut through the privet bushes to the door. "She keeps a frightened sort of watch on me, as though I too might disappear and leave her alone. Good Lord!" He stopped short, looking about the garden and fields beyond, from which the late October chill and damp drew heavy scents, sweet and tainted with decay. "It's the very day! Five years this night. There were low

clouds flying over the moon, too, just as now, and this cold, deathly wind, and these unwholesome smells, like plants strewed over corpses. Kin she hev forgotten?" He hurried to the door, as though some ghost pursued him, stopping again to glance fearfully around.

There was a certain chill, a hush in the uncanny night, as though some ill-boding Presence came slowly, steadily nearer. In the many noises of the wind, through the forest just within sight, he fancied he detected a cry almost human in its want and pain.

"Was it a banshee that Len said cried on the night when a Heath died, and on that night for years after came back to 'mind them that was livin' of the dead?"

The darkness, the cry, his own ghastly fancies, drew him to the door: he opened it and came in headlong, with a pale face, at which they all laughed.

"Here is your dry coat and slippers, uncle," said Winny, and now that he was in she sat down contented. He could not tell, furtively glancing around, whether they remembered the day or not. Joe, who sat smoking his pipe on the other side of the fire, was quieter than usual, and Bessy, resplendent in her new merino, more gossipy, but keeping, he noticed, a close motherly watch over Winny. However, she always did that. As for Winny, no one could ever tell what she thought.

She was the same chubby, dumpling little body that she had been five years ago. She rolled about the house rather than walked. There were the soft color and shy dimples coming and going on the honest face, and sudden laughter in the dark eyes, that made everybody long to hug her and make friends with her for ever. But while she had once been the fondest girl in the country-side of dances and gayety and pretty dresses, she lived, since her strange widowhood began, utterly alone but for the old man and the companionship which Joe and Bessy gave them. Apart from them, too, under all her affectionate, cheerful manner, in the absolute silence in which she covered her loss.

Ben could not tell if she remembered what night had come again. He forgot to speculate about it. The fire was so big and hospitable; the room, with its new green carpet and home-made lounges, so exactly the picture of comfort and home which he and Winny had planned; and through the open door there came glimpses of the bright kitchen and whiffs of the fat pullets roasting a dainty brown. Once Mrs. Joe brought back his vague fears: when the door was inadvertently opened, she hurried to close it.

"It is a wretched night," she said, shivering. "I fancy the dead would choose to be out in such wind and white moonlight, if they can come back"—stopping and stammering as she looked at Winny. "Coming along the edge of the woods yonder, I fancied I heard the cry of some wild beast in them. I told Joe so."

"It was the wind," said Joe. "But it had a curious sound, sergeant. No wonder it skeert a woman. It was like a dying beast in a cage."

"I heard it." The sergeant hurried away from the subject, and so did Joe. It was the happiest evening since they came into their new home. The work and bustle of moving were over, as well as the hard struggle of years, and the warm, quiet sense of home was real for the first time.

Only once it was jarred. Leonard, Joe's oldest boy, having been admitted as a special grace to sit up for supper, prowled about the room, to the discomfort of everybody but his mother and Winny, who vied with each other in spoiling him. Finally he crept up into an old leather chair that stood vacant, shining in the firelight, in the warmest corner, curled up his fat legs and prepared to go to sleep. There was a sudden silence in the room, as though a ghost had stood among them. It was the first time since Leonard Heath had disappeared that his place had been filled, though the chair had waited vacant through all those years. They were superstitious, and this was a sure omen to them of his death. "Let the

child stay," cried his mother, with a pale face: "he is the only one of his name that will ever sit in that place."

But Winny shook her head and took the boy hastily up, holding him tight to her breast and rocking him to sleep, while her eyes rested on the place left vacant, as though she had the second sight and Leonard Heath sat there alive before her.

CHAPTER IV.

It had not been difficult for Leonard to evade all pursuit. There was something in his secret flight, in the undertaking itself, that suited precisely his morbid, silly imagination and long-cherished dreams of romance. He hid himself in the old Fontaine house, leaving to Ludlow the purchase of the stove and old pieces of furniture which would make it habitable for him. He took a keen delight in donning the rusty wig and half-worn old Quaker dress which Ludlow bought him, and had all the triumph of a successful actor when Joe, on his visit of inquiry to the house a week later, was baffled by the deaf old man who peered at him through spectacles, brushing alongside of him while he gathered his fagot of wood. Perhaps the first month of his solitary sojourn there was the most satisfying of Leonard Heath's life. It had all the strong lines and Rembrandt shadows of a melodrama. There was the utter solitude, the ghosts of the long-dead inmates of the old homestead, the tedious work of search, and behind every moment the splendid possibility of the treasure and sudden opening of the enchanted gates of which it was the key. It did not dull a whit his zest of enjoyment to remember the dismay and anguish he had caused at home. He gloated over it rather, picturing his return among them loaded with his fairy-like gifts. In his long, solitary evenings, sitting over the stove, he used to plan this home-coming in a hundred different ways, for he was but a boy, under all, and an affectionate boy.

He had read accounts of the finding of long-murdered men, and liked to compare his own story with them. But they were but commonplace mysteries. His was like some wondrous fable.

He found the cellars under the house full of out-of-the-way crannies and damp recesses. Two or three times a day he felt his hand upon the treasure. Once a heap of old papers fell out of one cobweb-covered shelf. He found again a coal-bin half filled with worm-eaten ledgers. Disappointments, but disappointments that served to heat still more his sanguine fancy.

Weeks crept into months, and then Leonard began to grow hungry for something outside of the treasure or its promise. He had not calculated on his own weakness. At times his solitude was intolerable. There were days when he would have given up all for the sound of a word from Winny or one sight of Joe's sooty face.

He used to steal back to look in the lighted window in the evenings, hang around the road all day, in the hope that some of the family might pass that way, with a mingled relief and bitter anger if they did, and they did not recognize him.

But this fever of homesickness in time lost its force. In his own long failure, Joe's steady, moderate success began to goad and madden him. He gradually ceased to plan for Winny or Joe: passion and love cooled into morbid, sorrowful remembrances. Real life to him was narrowed down to success—the hidden treasure. The little canker of avarice, which in the boy's original nature was as inconsiderable as the leprous spot on the stately walls of the Jew's dwelling, began to slowly eat its deadening and certain way.

It is a history which we have no mind to follow minutely. The lad was a brave, gallant, candid lad. The love of money creeps on many such as he, like a parasite on a sturdy tree, leaving all beneath it poisonous and rotten. You can find such young men in every shop or street. Leonard, shut by his love of dramatic effect into this solitude,

fell a quicker victim. For the first year or two he used to prowl in his disguise out in the evenings—even made some eating-house acquaintances; but the zest of adventure soon palled; when among men of his own age, his gray beard and assumed treble became loathsome and disgusting to him. Yet he could not lay them off, and so surrender the wealth which the next day might yield.

For the idea of the treasure grew and grew like a noxious living thing within him, devouring all healthier natural strength. He searched in old books for accounts of recovered estates, and studied the English law on every point that could help him hereafter. He was resolved not to be altogether a tool in the hands of Ludlow. That worthy, however, after the second year of unsuccessful effort, appeared to have surrendered all hope of success; he forwarded regularly the small sum due to Heath for his care of the house—a sum sufficient to keep him alive—but ceased to even inquire as to the progress of his search.

After a time he used to send the money in a blank paper. This circumstance stung Leonard with a certain terrible pain. Ludlow was the only man who knew his real name. These quarterly letters, with their few words inside to "Leonard Heath," were the sole tie that held his old self bound to his fellow-men. Now that was cut loose he was like one dead.

After that I think he could never have been called a sane man, so entirely did the one idea master and trample out of sight all others. There was, however, method in his madness. The present house he knew had been built by the Fontaines on or near the foundations of the original Heath homestead. The covered entrance, therefore, to the secret vault could not be many rods removed from it. Beginning in the cellars, he subjected every foot of ground within an acre of the house to probing and digging. The ground was rocky. It was impossible to guess how deep the entrance had been covered by the fall-

ing walls of the house. Obligated to work secretly, and much of the time at night, it is no wonder that years passed with his task yet unfinished.

A man does not sink into the nature of a greedy, soulless polypus at one unbroken fall. There were times when Leonard Heath came up out of the pits of yellow clay in which he dug, and stood staring with dulled eyes down the sunny slopes of grass dotted with golden dandelions, or into the dusky lines of forest trees that shut him in. He had never, in his best moments, been a man akin to Nature, or cognizant of her secrets, yet there weighed upon him now a sense of bitter loss—of having fallen below the level of manhood by some unknown misstep which he could never regain. He would walk feebly about a while, as though trying to grope at some lost idea, and then go back to his grubbing again.

Sometimes, on quiet Sunday afternoons, a group of young mechanics with their sweethearts would saunter down the lane and into the woods—their gay dresses all aflutter in the sun and wind, and their chatter and laughter echoing through the trees. Now, the old man, as they called him, was in the habit of following the boys about who came nutting there, and try very timidly to join in their talk or jokes, but when these lovers came he hid himself in the house, out of all sight and hearing of them.

One winter the old man was missed: there was a little shop where he was used to go to buy a bit of meat or candles: he showed himself but once or twice at the counter, and then it was with so ghastly and haggard a face that Mrs. Ryan, the shopkeeper, whose heart was clean and sweet under her dirty woolen sacque, offered all sorts of womanly help to the lone creature. Heath refused it surlily, and crept back to his den, as he thought, to die. Some low, intermittent fever had sapped all the strength out of him. But not the obstinacy. He kept his secret, would not summon a physician. In the long, feverish nights he had called for Winny

and Joe: the long-starved heart woke to torture him. But in the morning his purpose remained firm.

There was but one treasure in life—wealth. If that was lost—what did death matter?

Yet, during the ensuing summer, he made but few efforts in his old search: used to sit for hours in the sun, half asleep—an old, broken man, in truth.

It was by accident, at last, that success came to him. He was groping one day in the cellar for coal, when he dislodged a loose stone, and a blast of cold, damp air met him. On removing part of the wall, a narrow bricked passage was revealed running underground. But Heath was only able to penetrate a few feet. There the roof of the tunnel had fallen in, and he was met by a solid mass of rock and earth hardened for half a century. His strength being gone, it was the work of months to remove this mass and the others which met him in his progress. It was late in the fall before he forced a way through the last obstacle, and saw the tunnel open clear before him. It ran to so great a distance under the woods that he fancied it must have had formerly some outer opening and served as a secret passage.

It was a cool, bright morning when, armed with a pickaxe and a bundle of short candles for his lantern, he entered the tunnel to end his search. The low roof, dripping with moisture, would not permit him to stand upright. He crept on into the long black vault, half bent, peering from side to side, the yellow gleam of his lantern flinging fantastic shadows; but nothing met his eyes except the green patches of mould that furred the walls and the black, slitting shapes like gigantic bats that moved before him.

His breath failed him as he moved. Surely, his hand was upon the treasure now! It had cost him dear. It was strange that in this final moment of success he should remember, as never before, what it had cost him.

He turned over heap after heap with his staff, but they appeared to be de-

cayed stuffs and clothes, and crumbled at his touch into dust. The darkness, which his light dully broke, closed behind him; he was shut in by it; thick, damp, ill-smelling night: the horror of it came upon him—the horror of darkness and cold. There was no joyful, brave beating of his heart, no cry with which the young man hails his victory. So worn-out was he, so dead was every nerve which would have thrilled with triumph.

The ground grew boggy under his feet, the bricks having sunk into a bed of slime. He groped on his way. The tunnel widened into a narrow room, a stone ledge ran about it, half way to the roof. There was a blackened heap upon the ledge, overgrown with brown and blood-colored fungus. Heath put down his lantern, his hands trembling: tore off the damp vegetable matter and found a copper case, with a lid screwed on tightly. There were some black letters on it, which he spelled out slowly:

"Title-deed of real estate in Liverpool belonging to the Heath family."

"I have a place in the world," gasped Leonard Heath, putting the cold metal to his face, as though it had been a living thing.

He turned presently to take up his lantern. The flame was driven out suddenly by a rush of cold air: there was a sound as of distant thunder. The walls of the tunnel had fallen behind him! he was buried in a living grave!

The church-bells began to ring. He could hear them, dulled and sweet, then they were silent. No lower sound could reach him. But it is worth recording, that through the final pain and horror of the night which settled down upon him he heard the birds twittering in the trees overhead, heard the grasshoppers chirp in the grass. There were voices reached him, too—voices which had long been silent: Bess calling to her baby, Winny singing an old Scotch lament of which she once was fond. He knew it was but the delirium of old thoughts unchained, unruled by his will.

But the tears wet his eyes for the first time for many years.

Three days passed, and Heath yet lived. The candles he had brought nourished him for a time. When they were gone he sat down passive. He held the treasure in his hand, the deeds to his place in the world, but he was a man in utter darkness, starving to death for a mouthful of food. Thought comes clearly sometimes in mortal pain. Leonard Heath knew now what he was: homeless, nameless, with neither wife, child nor friend to search for his hopes, or to say, with ever so little regret, "He was here, and he is gone."

The hubbub on the river would break and die not less unmissed than he. The physical torture of starvation gave him not so much suffering as to know this at last. He cried aloud. It seemed to him, so terrible was the pain of soul which thus uttered itself, that God himself must hear and answer. But the shock of his voice only loosened the pebbles from the wall, and they rolled rattling to the ground.

Toward the close of the third day, when he lay down in a new place on the bricks, a gust of damp air struck his face. Then it occurred to him to wonder why the vault had been free from noxious gases. There must be some opening to the outer air. Roused and startled, he dragged himself up and crawled to the wall from whence the draught came. The earth was lightly heaped; he cleared it away and found a passage. It was in fact a continuation of the tunnel in the opposite direction, but Heath was too weak to reason.

How long he was in creeping through he never knew.

There was a blast of cool night air; a heavy mass of tangled vines brushed in his face; he thrust them aside; a soft light glimmered before his eyes; it was the blue heaven studded with stars.

Leonard Heath crept out of the break in the bank and stood in a quaint old-fashioned garden about a cottage. A bird, frightened in its sleep, chirped in its nest in the cherry tree beside him; the path ran between rows of privet

bushes and crimson altheas; the damp night air was fragrant with the scent of spice-pinks.

But in the evening air there came also the sound of a woman's voice singing an old Scotch lament. The door of the house was partly made of glass, and a bright fire-light shone through it. He went to it. Some figures, which his dim eyes could scarcely distinguish, were gathered about the hearth. But in the warmest corner an old leathern chair shone cheerfully, vacant and waiting.

Then he opened the door, and, with a feeble cry, stood before them.

Later in the night, when Leonard Heath, warmed and clothed and fed, sat in the long-vacant seat and they all gathered about him, he unfastened the copper case. The lid was rusted into

holes. Joe only smiled, therefore, sorrowfully, knowing what the end must be. When the box was opened the deed fell from it, a heap of powdered dust, which a puff of wind blew over the hearth.

Joe put his hand on his brother's head: "My poor lad! You have lost your place in the world, after all."

But Leonard's face had a brightness which it had not learned when he was a boy:

"I lost it for many years, but I came to it again to-night."

He was silent for a little while.

"You found the fortune long ago, Joe," he said; and drew Winny's hand closer in his own, looking out from the warm home into the quiet Nature behind which God was waiting.

BALACCHI BROTHERS.

By REBECCA HARDING DAVIS.

"THERE'S a man, now, that has been famous in his time," said Davidge as we passed the mill, glancing in at the sunny gap in the side of the building.

I paused incredulously: Phil's lion so often turned out to be Snug the joiner. Phil was my chum at college, and in inviting me home to spend the vacation with him I thought he had fancied the resources of his village larger than they proved. In the two days since we came we had examined the old doctor's cabinet, listened superciliously to a debate in the literary club upon the Evils of the Stage, and passed two solid afternoons in the circle about the stove in the drug-shop, where the squire and the Methodist parson, and even the mild, white-cravatted young rector of St. Mark's, were wont to sharpen their wits by friction. What more was left? I was pos-

itive that I knew the mental gauge of every man in the village.

A little earlier or later in life a gun or fishing-rod would have satisfied me. The sleepy, sunny little market-town was shut in by the bronzed autumn meadows, that sent their long groping fingers of grass or parti-colored weeds drowsily up into the very streets: there were ranges of hills and heavy stretches of oak and beech woods, too, through which crept glittering creeks full of trout. But I was just at that age when the soul disdains all aimless pleasures: my game was Man. I was busy in philosophically testing, weighing, labeling human nature.

"Famous, eh?" I said, looking after the puffy figure of the miller in his floury canvas roundabout and corduroy trowsers, trotting up and down among the bags.

"That is one of the Balacchi Brothers," Phil answered as we walked on. "You've heard of them when you were a boy?"

I had heard of them. The great acrobats were as noted in their line of art as Ellsler and Jenny Lind in theirs. But acrobats and danseuses had been alike brilliant, wicked impossibilities to my youth, for I had been reared a Covenanter of the Covenanters. In spite of the doubting philosophies with which I had clothed myself at college, that old Presbyterian training clung to me in everyday life close as my skin.

After that day I loitered about the mill, watching this man, whose life had been spent in one godless theatre after another, very much as the Florentine peasants looked after Dante when they knew he had come back from hell. I was on the lookout for the taint, the abnormal signs, of vice. It was about that time that I was fevered with the missionary enthusiasm, and in Polynesia, where I meant to go (but where I never did go), I declared to Phil daily that I should find in every cannibal the half-effaced image of God, only waiting to be quickened into grace and virtue. That was quite conceivable. But that a flashy, God-defying actor could be the same man at heart as this fat, good-tempered, gossiping miller, who jogged to the butcher's every morning for his wife, a basket on one arm and a baby on the other, was not conceivable. He was a close dealer at the butcher's, too, though dribbling gossip there as everywhere; a regular attendant at St. Mark's, with his sandy-headed flock about him, among whom he slept comfortably enough, it is true, but with as pious dispositions as the rest of us.

I remember how I watched this man, week in and week out. It was a trivial matter, but it irritated me unendurably to find that this circus-rider had human blood precisely like my own: it outraged my early religion.

We talk a great deal of the rose-colored illusions in which youth wraps the world, and the agony it suffers as they are stripped from its bare, hard face.

But the fact is, that youth (aside from its narrow, passionate friendships) is usually apt to be acrid and watery and sour in its judgment and creeds—it has the quality of any other unripe fruit: it is middle age that is just and tolerant, that has found room enough in the world for itself and all human flies to buzz out their lives good-humoredly together. It is youth who can see a tangible devil at work in every party or sect opposed to its own, whose enemy is always a villain, and who finds treachery and falsehood in the friend who is occasionally bored or indifferent: it is middle age that has discovered the reasonable sweet *juste milieu* of human nature—who knows few saints perhaps, but is apt to find its friend and grocer and shoemaker agreeable and honest fellows. It is these vehement illusions, these inherited bigotries and prejudices, that tear and cripple a young man as they are taken from him one by one. He creeps out of them as a crab from the shell that has grown too small for him, but he thinks he has left his identity behind him.

It was such a reason as this that made me follow the miller assiduously, and cultivate a quasi intimacy with him, in the course of which I picked the following story from him. It was told at divers times, and with many interruptions and questions from me. But for obvious reasons I have made it continuous. It had its meaning to me, coarse and common though it was—the same which Christ taught in the divine beauty of His parables. Whether that meaning might not be found in the history of every human life, if we had eyes to read it, is matter for question.

Balacchi Brothers? And you've heard of them, eh? Well, well! (with a pleased nod, rubbing his hands on his knees). Yes, sir. Fifteen years ago they were known as The Admirable Crichtons of the Ring. It was George who got up that name: I did not see the force of it. But no name could claim too much for us. Why, I could show you notices in the newspapers that— I used to clip them out and stuff my pocket-book with them

as we went along, but after I quit the business I pasted them in an old ledger, and I often now read them of nights. No doubt I lost a good many, too.

Yes, sir: I was one of Balacchi Brothers. My name is Zack Loper. And it was then, of course.

You think we would have plenty of adventures? Well, no—not a great many. There's a good deal of monotony in the business. Towns seem always pretty much alike to me. And there was such a deal of rehearsing to be done by day and at night. I looked at nothing but the rope and George: the audience was nothing but a packed flat surface of upturned, staring eyes and half-open mouths. It was an odd sight, yes, when you come to think of it. I never was one for adventures. I was mostly set upon shaving close through the week, so that when Saturday night came I'd have something to lay by: I had this mill in my mind, you see. I was married, and had my wife and a baby that I'd never seen waiting for me at home. I was brought up to milling, but the trapeze paid better. I took to it naturally, as one might say.

But George!—he had adventures every week. And as for acquaintances! Why, before we'd be in a town two days he'd be hail-fellow-well-met with half the people in it. That fellow could scent a dance or a joke half a mile off. You never see such wide-awake men now-a-days. People seem to me half dead or asleep when I think of him.

Oh, I thought you knew. My partner Balacchi. It was Balacchi on the bills: the actors called him Signor, and people like the manager, South, and we, who knew him well, George. I asked him his real name once or twice, but he joked it off. "How many names must a man be saddled with?" he said. I don't know it to this day, nor who he had been. They hinted there was something queer about his story, but I'll go my bail it was a clean one, whatever it was.

You never heard how "Balacchi Brothers" broke up? That was as near to an adventure as I ever had. Come over to this bench and I'll tell it to you. You

don't dislike the dust of the mill? The sun's pleasanter on this side.

It was early in August of '56 when George and I came to an old town on the Ohio, half city, half village, to play an engagement. We were under contract with South then, who provided the rest of the troupe, three or four posture-girls, Stradi the pianist, and a Madame Somebody, who gave readings and sang. "Concert" was the heading in large caps on the bills, "Balacchi Brothers will give their aesthetic *tableaux vivants* in the interludes," in agate below.

"I've got to cover you fellows over with respectability here," South said. "Rope-dancing won't go down with these aristocratic church-goers."

I remember how George was irritated. "When I was my own agent," he said, "I only went to the cities. Educated people can appreciate what we do, but in these country-towns we rank with circus-riders."

George had some queer notions about his business. He followed it for sheer love of it, as I did for money. I've seen all the great athletes since, but I never saw one with his wonderful skill and strength, and with the grace of a woman too, or a deer. Now that takes hard, steady work, but he never flinched from it, as I did; and when night came, and the people and lights, and I thought of nothing but to get through, I used to think he had the pride of a thousand women in every one of his muscles and nerves: a little applause would fill him with a mad kind of fury of delight and triumph. South had a story that George belonged to some old Knickerbocker family, and had run off from home years ago. I don't know. There was that wild restless blood in him that no home could have kept him.

We were to stay so long in this town that I found rooms for us with an old couple named Peters, who had but lately moved in from the country, and had half a dozen carpenters and masons boarding with them. It was cheaper than the hotel, and George preferred that kind of people to educated men, which made me doubt that story of his

having been a gentleman. The old woman Peters was uneasy about taking us, and spoke out quite freely about it when we called, not knowing that George and I were Balacchi Brothers ourselves.

"The house has been respectable so far, gentlemen," she said. "I don't know what about taking in them half-naked, drunken play-actors. What do you say, Susy?" to her granddaughter.

"Wait till you see them, grandmother," the girl said gently. "I should think that men whose lives depended every night on their steady eyes and nerves would not dare to touch liquor."

"You are quite right—nor even tobacco," said George. It was such a prompt, sensible thing for the little girl to say that he looked at her attentively a minute, and then went up to the old lady smiling: "We don't look like drinking men do we, madam?"

"No, no, sir. I did not know that you were the I-talians." She was quite flustered and frightened, and said cordially enough how glad she was to have us both. But it was George she shook hands with. There was something clean and strong and inspiring about that man that made most women friendly to him on sight.

Why, in two days you'd have thought he'd never had another home than the Peters's. He helped the old man milk, and had tinkered up the broken kitchen-table, and put in half a dozen window-panes, and was intimate with all the boarders; could give the masons the prices of job-work at the East, and put Stoll the carpenter on the idea of contract-houses, out of which he afterward made a fortune. It was nothing but jokes and fun and shouts of laughter when he was in the house: even the old man brightened up and told some capital stories. But from the first I noticed that George's eye followed Susy watchfully wherever she went, though he was as distant and respectful with her as he was with most women. He had a curious kind of respect for women, George had. Even the Slingsbys, that all the men in the theatre joked with, he used to pass by as though they were logs leaning against

the wall. They were the posture-girls, and anything worse besides the name I never saw.

There was a thing happened once on that point which I often thought might have given me a clew to his history if I'd followed it up. We were playing in one of the best theatres in New York (they brought us into some opera), and the boxes were filled with fine ladies beautifully dressed, or, I might say, half dressed.

George was in one of the wings. "It's a pretty sight," I said to him.

"It's a shameful sight!" he said with an oath. "The Slingsbys do it for their living, but these women—"

I said they were ladies, and ought to be treated with respect. I was amazed at the heat he was in.

"I had a sister, Zack, and there's where I learned what a woman should be."

"I never heard of your sister, George," said I. I knew he would not have spoken of her but for the heat he was in.

"No. I'm as dead to her, being what I am, as if I were six feet under ground."

I turned and looked at him, and when I saw his face I said no more, and I never spoke of it again. It was something neither I nor any other man had any business with.

So, when I saw how he was touched by Susy and drawn toward her, it raised her in my opinion, though I'd seen myself how pretty and sensible a little body she was. But I was sorry, for I knew 'twan't no use. The Peters were Methodists, and Susy more strict than any of them; and I saw she looked on the theatre as the gate of hell, and George and me swinging over it.

I don't think, though, that George saw how strong her feeling about it was, for after we'd been there a week or two he began to ask her to go and see us perform, if only for once. I believe he thought the girl would come to love him if she saw him at his best. I don't wonder at it, sir. I've seen those pictures and statues they've made of the old gods, and I reckon they put in them the best they thought a man could be; but

I never knew what real manhood was until I saw my partner when he stood quiet on the stage waiting the signal to begin, the light full on his keen blue eyes, the gold-worked velvet tunic and his perfect figure.

He looked more like other men in his ordinary clothing. George liked a bit of flash, too, in his dress—a red necktie or gold chain stretched over his waistcoat.

Susy refused at first, steadily. At last, however, came our final night, when George was to produce his great leaping feat, never yet performed in public. We had been practicing it for months, and South judged it best to try it first before a small, quiet audience, for the risk was horrible. Whether, because it was to be the last night, and her kind heart disliked to hurt him by refusal, or whether she loved him better than either she or he knew, I could not tell, but I saw she was strongly tempted to go. She was an innocent little thing, and not used to hide what she felt. Her eyes were red that morning, as though she had been crying all the night. Perhaps, because I was a married man, and quieter than George, she acted more freely with me than him.

"I wish I knew what to do," she said, looking up to me with her eyes full of tears. There was nobody in the room but her grandmother.

"I couldn't advise you, Miss Susy," says I. "Your church-discipline goes against our trade, I know."

"I know what's right myself: I don't need church-discipline to teach me," she said sharply.

"I think I'd go, Susy," said her grandmother. "It is a concert, after all: it's not a play."

"The name don't alter it."

Seeing the temper she was in, I thought it best to say no more, but the old lady added, "It's Mr. George's last night. Dear, dear! how I'll miss him!"

Susy turned quickly to the window. "Why does he follow such godless ways, then?" she cried. She stood still a good while, and when she turned about her pale little face made my heart ache. "I'll take home Mrs. Tyson's dress now,

grandmother," she said, and went out of the room. I forgot to tell you Susy was a seamstress. Well, the bundle was large, and I offered to carry it for her, as the time for rehearsal did not come till noon. She crept alongside of me without a word, looking weak and done-out: she was always so busy and bright, it was the more noticeable. The house where the dress was to go was one of the largest in the town. The servant showed us into a back parlor, and took the dress up to her mistress. I looked around me a good deal, for I'd never been in such a house before; but very soon I caught sight of a lady who made me forget carpets and pictures. I only saw her in the mirror, for she was standing by the fireplace in the front room. The door was open between. It wasn't that she was especially pretty, but in her white morning-dress, with the lace about her throat and her fair hair drawn back from her face, I thought she was the delicatest, softest, finest thing of man- or woman-kind I ever saw.

"Look there, Susy! look there!" I whispered.

"It is a Mrs. Lloyd from New York. She is here on a visit. That is her husband," and then she went down into her own gloomy thoughts again.

The husband was a grave, middle-aged man. He had had his paper up before his face, so that I had not seen him before.

"You will go for the tickets then, Edward?" she said.

"If you make a point of it, yes," in an annoyed tone. "But I don't know why you make a point of it. The musical part of the performance is beneath contempt, I understand, and the real attraction is the exhibition of these mountebanks of trapezists, which will be simply disgusting to you. You would not encourage such people at home: why would you do it here?"

"They are not necessarily wicked," I noticed there was a curious unsteadiness in her voice, as though she was hurt and agitated. I thought perhaps she knew I was there.

"There is very little hope of any re-

deeming qualities in men who make a trade of twisting their bodies like apes," he said. "Contortionists and ballet-dancers and clowns and harlequins—" he rattled all the names over with a good deal of uncalled-for sharpness, I thought, calling them "dissolute and degraded, the very offal of humanity." I could not understand his heat until he added, "I never could comprehend your interest and sympathy for that especial class, Ellnor."

"No, you could not, Edward," she said quietly. "But I have it. I never have seen an exhibition of the kind. But I want to see this to-night, if you will gratify me. I have no reason," she added when he looked at her curiously. "The desire is unaccountable to myself."

The straightforward look of her blue eyes as she met his seemed strangely familiar and friendly to me.

At that moment Susy stood up to go. Her cheeks were burning and her eyes sparkling. "Dissolute and degraded!" she said again and again when we were outside. But I took no notice.

As we reached the house she stopped me when I turned off to go to rehearsal. "You'll get seats for grandmother and me, Mr. Balacchi?" she said.

"You're going, then, Susy?"

"Yes, I'm going."

Now the house in which we performed was a queer structure. A stock company, thinking there was a field for a theatre in the town, had taken a four-story building, gutted the interior, and fitted it up with tiers of seats and scenery. The stock company was starved out, however, and left the town, and the theatre was used as a gymnasium, a concert-room or a church by turns. Its peculiarity was, that it was both exceedingly lofty and narrow, which suited our purpose exactly.

It was packed that night from dome to pit. George and I had rehearsed our new act both morning and afternoon, South watching us without intermission. South was terribly nervous and anxious, half disposed, at the last minute, to forbid it, although it had been announced on the

bills for a week. But a feat which is successful in an empty house, with but one spectator, when your nerves are quiet and blood cool, is a different thing before an excited, terrified, noisy audience, your whole body at fever heat. However, George was cool as a cucumber, indeed almost indifferent about the act, but in a mad boyish glee all day about everything else. I suppose the reason was that Susy was going.

South had lighted the house brilliantly and brought in a band. And all classes of people poured into the theatre until it could hold no more. I saw Mrs. Peters in one of the side-seats, with Susy's blushing, frightened little face beside her. George, standing back among the scenes, saw her too: I think, indeed, it was all he did see.

There were the usual readings from Shakespeare at first.

While Madame was on, South came to us. "Boys," said he, "let this matter go over a few weeks. A little more practice will do you no harm. You can substitute some other trick, and these people will be none the wiser."

George shrugged his shoulders impatiently: "Nonsense! When did you grow so chicken-hearted, South? It is I who have to run the risk, I fancy."

I suppose South's uneasiness had infected me. "I am quite willing to put it off," I said. I had felt gloomy and superstitious all day. But I never ventured to oppose George more decidedly than that.

He only laughed by way of reply, and went off to dress. South looked after him, I remember, saying what a magnificently-built fellow he was. If we could only have seen the end of that night's work!

As I went to my dressing-room I saw Mrs. Lloyd and her husband in one of the stage-boxes, with one or two other ladies and gentlemen. She was plainly and darkly dressed, but to my mind she looked like a princess among them all. I could not but wonder what interest she could have in such a rough set as we, although her husband, I confess, did judge us hardly.

After the readings came the concert part of the performance, and then what South chose to call the Moving Tableaux, which was really nothing in the world but ballet-dancing. George and I were left to crown the whole. I had some ordinary trapeze-work to do at first, but George was reserved for the new feat, in order that his nerves might be perfectly unshaken. When I went out alone and bowed to the audience, I observed that Mrs. Lloyd was leaning eagerly forward, but at the first glance at my face she sank back with a look of relief, and turned away, that she might not see my exploits. It nettled me a little, I think, yet they were worth watching.

Well, I finished, and then there was a song to give me time to cool. I went to the side-scenes where I could be alone, for that five minutes. I had no risk to run in the grand feat, you see, but I had George's life in my hands. I haven't told you yet—have I?—what it was he proposed to do.

A rope was suspended from the centre of the dome, the lower end of which I held, standing in the highest gallery opposite the stage. Above the stage hung the trapeze on which George and the two posture-girls were to be. At a certain signal I was to let the rope go, and George, springing from the trapeze across the full width of the dome, was to catch it in mid-air, a hundred feet above the heads of the people. You understand? The mistake of an instant of time on either his part or mine, and death was almost certain. The plan we had thought surest was for South to give the word, and then that both should count—One, Two, Three! At Three the rope fell and he leaped. We had practiced so often that we thought we counted as one man.

When the song was over the men hung the rope and the trapeze. Jenny and Lou Slingsby swung themselves up to it, turned a few somersaults and then were quiet. They were only meant to give effect to the scene in their gauzy dresses and spangles. Then South came forward and told the audience what we meant to do. It was a feat, he said,

which had never been produced before in any theatre, and in which failure was death. No one but that most daring of all acrobats, Balacchi, would attempt it. Now, I knew South so well that I saw under all his confident, bragging tone he was more anxious and doubtful than he had ever been. He hesitated a moment, and then requested that after we took our places the audience should preserve absolute silence, and refrain from even the slightest movement until the feat was over. The merest trifle might distract the attention of the performers, and render their eyes and hold unsteady, he said. He left the stage, and the music began.

I went round to take my place in the gallery. George had not yet left his room. As I passed I tapped at the door and called, "Good luck, old fellow!"

"That's certain now, Zack," he answered with a joyous laugh. He was so exultant, you see, that Susy had come.

But the shadow of death seemed to have crept over me. When I took my stand in the lofty gallery, and looked down at the brilliant lights and the great mass of people, who followed my every motion as one man, and the two glittering, half-naked girls swinging in the distance, and heard the music rolling up thunders of sound, it was all ghastly and horrible to me, sir. Some men have such presentiments, they say: I never had before or since. South remained on the stage perfectly motionless, in order, I think, to maintain his control over the audience.

The trumpets sounded a call, and in the middle of a burst of triumphant music George came on the stage. There was a deafening outbreak of applause, and then a dead silence, but I think every man and woman felt a thrill of admiration of the noble figure. Poor George! the new, tight-fitting dress of purple velvet that he had bought for this night set off his white skin, and his fine head was bare, with no covering but the short curls that Susy liked.

It was for Susy! He gave one quick glance up at her, and a bright, boyish smile, as if telling her not to be afraid,

which all the audience understood, and answered by an involuntary, long-drawn breath. I looked at Susy. The girl's colorless face was turned to George, and her hands were clasped as though she saw him already dead before her; but she could be trusted, I saw. *She* would utter no sound. I had only time to glance at her, and then turned to my work. George and I dared not take our eyes from each other.

There was a single bugle note, and then George swung himself up to the trapeze. The silence was like death as he steadied himself and slowly turned so as to front me. As he turned he faced the stage-box for the first time. He had reached the level of the posture-girls, who fluttered on either side, and stood on the swaying rod poised on one foot, his arms folded, when in the breathless stillness there came a sudden cry and the words, "Oh, Charley! Charley!"

Even at the distance where I stood I saw George start and a shiver pass over his body. He looked wildly about him. "To me! to me!" I shouted.

He fixed his eye on mine and steadied himself. There was a terrible silent excitement in the people, in the very air.

There was the mistake. We should have stopped then, shaken as he was, but South, bewildered and terrified, lost control of himself: he gave the word.

I held the rope loose—held George with my eyes—One!

I saw his lips move: he was counting with me.

Two!

His eye wandered, turned to the stage-box.

Three!

Like a flash, I saw the white upturned faces below me, the posture-girls' gestures of horror, the dark springing figure through the air, that wavered—and fell a shapeless mass on the floor.

There was a moment of deathlike silence, and then a wild outcry—women fainting, men cursing and crying out in that senseless, helpless way they have when there is sudden danger. By the time I had reached the floor they had straightened out his shattered limbs, and

two or three doctors were fighting their way through the great crowd that was surging about him.

Well, sir, at that minute what did I hear but George's voice above all the rest, choked and hollow as it was, like a man calling out of the grave: "The women! Good God! don't you see the women?" he gasped.

Looking up then, I saw those miserable Slingsbys hanging on to the trapeze for life. What with the scare and shock, they'd lost what little sense they had, and there they hung helpless as limp rags high over our heads.

"Damn the Slingsbys!" said I. God forgive me! But I saw this battered wreck at my feet that had been George. Nobody seemed to have any mind left. Even South stared stupidly up at them and then back at George. The doctors were making ready to lift him, and half of the crowd were gaping in horror, and the rest yelling for ladders or ropes, and scrambling over each other, and there hung the poor flimsy wretches, their eyes starting out of their heads from horror, and their lean fingers loosing their hold every minute. But, sir—I couldn't help it—I turned from them to watch George as the doctors lifted him.

"It's hardly worth while," whispered one.

But they raised him and, sir—the body went one way and the legs another.

I thought he was dead. I couldn't see that he breathed, when he opened his eyes and looked up for the Slingsbys. "Put me down," he said, and the doctors obeyed him. There was that in his voice that they had to obey him, though it wasn't but a whisper.

"Ladders are of no use," he said.

"Loper!"

"Yes, George."

"You can swing yourself up. Do it."

I went. I remember the queer stunned feeling I had: my joints moved like a machine.

When I had reached the trapeze, he said, as cool as if he were calling the figures for a Virginia reel, "Support them, you—Loper. Now, lower the trapeze, men—carefully!"

It was the only way their lives could be saved, and he was the only man to see it. He watched us until the girls touched the floor more dead than alive, and then his head fell back and the life seemed to go suddenly out of him like the flame out of a candle, leaving only the dead wick.

As they were carrying him out I noticed for the first time that a woman was holding his hand. It was that frail little wisp of a Susy, that used to blush and tremble if you spoke to her suddenly, and here she was quite quiet and steady in the midst of this great crowd.

"His sister, I suppose?" one of the doctors said to her.

"No, sir. If he lives I will be his wife." The old gentleman was very respectful to her after that, I noticed.

Now, the rest of my story is very muddled, you'll say, and confused. But the truth is, I don't understand it myself. I ran on ahead to Mrs. Peters's to prepare his bed for him, but they did not bring him to Peters's. After I waited an hour or two, I found George had been taken to the principal hotel in the place, and a bed-room and every comfort that money could buy were there for him. Susy came home sobbing late in the night, but she told me nothing, except that those who had a right to have charge of him had taken him. I found afterward the poor girl was driven from the door of his room, where she was waiting like a faithful dog. I went myself, but I fared no better. What with surgeons and professional nurses, and the gentlemen that crowded about with their solemn looks of authority, I dared not ask to see him. Yet I believe still George would rather have had old Loper by him in his extremity than any of them. Once, when the door was opened, I thought I saw Mrs. Lloyd stooping over the bed between the lace curtains, and just then her husband came out talking to one of the surgeons.

He said: "It is certain there were here the finest elements of manhood. And I will do my part to rescue him from the abyss into which he has fallen."

"Will you tell me how George is, sir?"

I asked, pushing up. "Balacchi? My partner?"

Mr. Lloyd turned away directly, but the surgeon told me civilly enough that if George's life could be saved, it must be with the loss of one or perhaps both of his legs.

"He'll never mount a trapeze again, then," I said, and I suppose I groaned; for to think of George helpless—

"God forbid!" cried Mr. Lloyd, sharply. "Now look here, my good man: you can be of no possible use to Mr.—Balacchi as you call him. He is in the hands of his own people, and he will feel, as they do, that the kindest thing you can do is to let him alone."

There was nothing to be done after that but to touch my hat and go out, but as I went I heard him talking of "inexplicable madness and years of wasted opportunities."

Well, sir, I never went again: the words hurt like the cut of a whip, though 'twan't George that spoke them. But I quit business, and hung around the town till I heard he was going to live, and I broke up my contract with South. I never went on a trapeze again. I felt as if the infernal thing was always dripping with his blood after that day. Anyhow, all the heart went out of the business for me with George. So I came back here and settled down to the milling, and by degrees I learned to think of George as a rich and fortunate man.

I've nearly done now—only a word or two more. About six years afterward there was a circus came to town, and I took the wife and children and went. I always did when I had the chance. It was the old Adam in me yet, likely.

Well, sir, among the attractions of the circus was the great and unrivaled Hercules, who could play with cannonballs as other men would with dice. I don't know what made me restless and excited when I read about this man. It seemed as though the old spirit was coming back to me again. I could hardly keep still when the time drew near for him to appear. I don't know what I expected. But when he came out from behind the curtain I shouted

out like a madman, "Balacchi! George! George!"

He stopped short, looked about, and catching sight of me tossed up his cap with his old boyish shout; then he remembered himself, and went on with his performance.

He was lame—yes, in one leg. The other was gone altogether. He walked on crutches. Whether the strength had gone into his chest and arms, I don't know; but there he stood tossing about the cannon-balls as I might marbles. So full of hearty good-humor too, joking with his audience, and so delighted when they gave him a round of applause.

After the performance I hurried around the tent, and you may be sure there was rejoicing that made the manager and other fellows laugh.

George haled me off with him down the street. He cleared the ground with that crutch and wooden leg like a steam-engine. "Come! come along!" he cried: "I've something to show you, Loper."

He took me to a quiet boarding-house, and there, in a cozy room, was Susy with a four-year old girl.

"We were married as soon as I could

hobble about," he said, "and she goes with me and makes a home wherever I am."

Susy nodded and blushed and laughed. "Baby and I," she said. "Do you see Baby? She has her father's eyes, do you see?"

"She is her mother, Loper," said George—"just as innocent and pure and foolish—just as sure of the Father in heaven taking care of her. They've made a different man of me in some ways—a different man," bending his head reverently.

After a while I began, "You did not stay with—?"

But Balacchi frowned. "I knew where I belonged," he said.

Well, he's young yet. He's the best Hercules in the profession, and has laid up a snug sum. Why don't he invest it and retire? I doubt if he'll ever do that, sir. He may do it, but I doubt it. He can't change his blood, and there's that in Balacchi that makes me suspect he will die with the velvet and gilt on, and in the height of good-humor and fun with his audience.



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