

Grip Sarah G. Lanney

OLIVE LOGAN'S
NEW
CHRISTMAS STORY.

JOHN MORRIS'S MONEY.

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NEW YORK:
THE AMERICAN NEWS COMPANY,
119 & 121 NASSAU STREET.
1867.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1866, by
THE AMERICAN NEWS COMPANY,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of New
York.

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JOHN MORRIS'S MONEY.

I.

INTRODUCTORY AND EXPLANATORY, AND
THEREFORE, PERHAPS BETTER SKIPPED.

It was late one night in January (more years ago than I think it necessary to mention), and the snow had been falling heavily all day. The beautiful white flakes had settled down like an ermine robe on the house-tops opposite, and hung, making a spotless fringe of rich, colorless chenille, on the bare, gaunt limbs of the trees in the park. Our ash barrel (which had not been removed from before our door for some days on account of an unpleasant difficulty between the street-surveyors and the street-conveyors), was frosted all over with this white coating, and looked precisely as if it contained a huge wedding-cake covered inches deep with luscious sugary "icing." Our little darling girl, Baby Lollipops, who was four years old and had never seen the snow, or if she had did not remember it, called out to me in a clear, sharp, high little voice, musical as the clangor of a silvery bell, "Oh, Mamma, look! somebody's dawn and emptied de flour barrel all over de celler-door!" And when I took the little sprite up, and, lifting her high in my arms, showed her through the window-panes that numberless "flour-barrels" had cast their contents over the grocery-man's wheel-barrow, and the barber's pole, and the stationary news-boy's awning-covered tent, and the lamp-post on the corner, and the stone carriage-step before the Highuns' door, and had even left a thin ridge on the old-fashioned "scraper" before our own, she clapped her chubby hands together and laughed with glee and kicked vigorously, thereby endangering her personal safety as she sat perched on my shoulder, holding on to my front hair for security—and all the while she passed baby comment on the novel

scene before her by repeating the one word—"boo-ful! boo-ful!"

It was beautiful. Like all spotless, pure and heaven-sent things, it was beautiful. So long as it remained uncontaminated by the touch of man, it lay in its undefiled glory like the down from an angel's wing. And now that the moon was rising in cold and mysterious beauty, casting her steel-blue rays on the blanched objects at her feet, the freezing night air seemed to shut out sounds as though they were too worldly to intrude on this ghostly scene, over which the orb of night presided with queenly grace. But this was after dusk, when the darkness had sent good working-men home (all except John), and had working men and bad idling men out; and had bid the weary seamstress rise and seek relief from the fatigue of sitting, by encountering the fatigue of walking; when the reputable shops had closed and the disreputable ones had opened; and when, spite of the efforts of restless spirits to turn day into night, and quiet into tumult, the general feeling was one of rest.

During the day it was different. Then all had been noise and hubbub and clamor. The snow had fallen on the pavement and in the street as well as on the house and tree-tops. But, alas! on the pavement and in the street it had been crushed and crunched and blackened, till it no more resembled its sister-covering on the house and tree-tops than the noisy, bustling day resembled the calm and peaceful night. The hurrying footsteps of hundreds of men and scores of women had trampled it down until the once spotless snow, as if ashamed of its degradation, now ran in liquid blackness to the gutters beyond. Men, slipping and sliding over the uncertain surface had "cursed the snow" and uttered oaths at it as if it had been a living and sentient thing; and women, contemplating the bedraggled fate of sometime spotless petticoats, had stamped their feet with vexation,

and tutted and pished with true feminine asperity. The declining sun had sent his adieux to earth in the shape of two cutting winds which met and mingled, and called themselves a Nor' Easter; and Nor' Easter laughed at the people as they muffled themselves closer in their outer wrappings, all ineffectual to stave off the cutting, insidious breath of the winter's night; and then, suddenly Nor' said to Easter "Halloa! what's this black water trying to escape us and run away down into the city sewers? Let's freeze it!" And so the poor snow of the pavement and the street was caught in the act of trying to escape, and frozen into a thin, filmy substance, all cracking into flaws and fuller of dirt than before; while the spotless snow of the house and tree-tops looked down wonderingly at her fallen sister, with some pity for her in her heart it is true, but still turning up her nose at her vigorously, for society's sake.

It was past eight o'clock, and John had not come home. The chops were done brown and even scorched, and the biscuit-crusts hard as a board, from staying too long in the oven. The butter, which had been frozen stiff by the cold weather was now running in oily streams over the hearth-stone where I had placed it to soften. Again and again I went to the window, and shading my eyes with my hands peered out intently into the darkness of the night. I was not exactly worried. *Oh, no!* It was an express understanding between me and my husband that I was not to worry about him if he happened to stay out late. The chances of his being run over by a street-car and killed, and the chances of his being detained an hour or two longer at his work were about in the proportion of one to a hundred. Therefore, I must never worry. And I *did not*. *Oh dear no!* Only I wished he would come, that's all!

I had just seated myself at the table despairingly, having resolved, after many doubts as to the propriety of such a course, to take my supper without him, when suddenly I heard the sharp click of a night-key in the front door, immediately followed by the dear, springy, elastic step I knew so well.

"Well, darling, did you think I was never coming?" said John in his cheery tone, hanging his cap and overcoat on a peg near the door. "Whew!" he continued without waiting for a reply, "whew! isn't it cold? Give me my supper; pet, I am as hungry as a hound."

"Baby's been abed these two hours. What kept you so late, John?" I asked, bending down to take the butter-plate with my right hand, and shielding my face from the fire with my left.

"Tell you in a minute. Why don't you give me a kiss?" I raised my lips to his, and he caught my chin with his right hand and placed his left fore-finger in close proximity to my nose. "Now, Nell," he said reproach-

fully, "you've been crying! I see it. Your eyes are as red as"—and finding himself at fault for a simile, he could only say—"possible. They are. You've been worrying about me when you should not. You know you shouldn't tease yourself in this way. My poor little wife worrying herself to death about a great, worthless fellow like me."

"No, John," I answered, for the purpose of reassuring him. "You are mistaken. I haven't worried myself about you—*oh, no!*—not in the least!"

I think this was about the most unmitigated falsehood I ever told in my life. I *had* worried myself about him until I was fairly sick, and no number of doses of valerian except that single one of seeing John enter the door, as he had now done, would have been effectual in calming my agitated nerves. I don't believe people's hair turns gray from agony. For the last two hours I had seen my John run over and killed by every individual and respective horse-car in town, as well as maimed by two trucks, and drowned off one ferry-boat, and yet my hair was as brown and silky as ever! Never tell me! I don't believe a word of their stupid stories!

"In the first place," said John, stirring his coffee and then drinking it down without taking the spoon from the cup: "in the first place I've worked like a horse to-day, and old Williamson is just tickled to death with me. He says to me, says he, 'By George! John Morris, you'll be a rich man some day, sir, if you keep on.' And I don't wonder he's pleased, for, oh, Nelly! she *is* beautiful!"

"Is she, John?" said I, for I knew to whom he alluded without questioning.

"Yes; if you could see her sitting the water like a duck, and with her slender masts cleaving the air and pointing to the sky as though to remind us that up there lived the Great Boss—the great, great One, Nell, whose poor frail journeymen we all are. Kiss me, my girl."

I knew this was coming. John always had to be kissed whenever he grew moralizing, reflective or theological; his great warm heart was flowing over with love, and his dear nature was one of that entwining character which finds joy in every outward expression of affection.

"I'm going up to kiss Baby!" And without another word he departed on his errand, leaving me in an agony of fear—lest he should wake her and give me a sleepy, cross child to nurse during the rest of the evening. He soon returned, however, having accomplished his purpose without any disagreeable consequences.

"To-day we put up the figger-head. It's a woman. They call her Amandy, because that's the name of old Williamson's daughter; and he told the carver-fellows to make the figger-head look like her. But, Lord bless you, it's oceans too pretty for that proud

thing, with a stuck-up nose. It's a regular beauty. Nell, it looks like you."

"Nonsense, John," said I. But I was mightily pleased nevertheless. If he had said I looked like the ship itself, I should have been pleased; because I knew that anything about a boat or a boat's gear was handsome to a man who loved his trade, and whose trade was that of a ship-carpenter, as my husband's was.

"Well, all that kept me late; and just as I was coming away, worried myself because I knew you'd be worried about me, I met Mr. Williamson, who called out to me by name. 'Morris,' says he, 'here's a letter that I think is for you. The address is written in such a scrawly little bit of a hand' (Williamson's fist, you know, is as big as an elephant's) 'that I can scarcely make it out. Still I think it's for you.'

"It was for me, Nell," continued John; "It was a letter from California."

"California, John! Who do you know in California?"

"It was from an old aunt of mine, who went there years and years ago. I have but very little recollection of her—except that she was kind and gentle to me when I was a boy. She was my poor mother's favorite sister. Poor mother! Kiss me, Nell. Well, Aunt Julia married and went away; and the next I heard of her was that her husband had died, and left her a great fortune. Soon after that we heard she had foolishly embarked all her money in a speculation which proved disastrous, and she now writes to me to ask me if I can't give her a home for the rest of her days, to shelter her old age from suffering and want."

"And how did you answer, John?" I asked.

"I haven't answered at all yet. I waited to see what my little wife would say about it."

I crept up to him stealthily and, getting very close, placed my nose under his soft whiskers, thus bringing my lips almost in contact with his ear.

"Your little wife says that so long as she has a roof to shelter *her*, or crust of bread to eat, she will share both with any kith or kin of John Morris's."

I shan't tell you any more that he said, for he always overrated everything I did; nor how he kissed me and put his arm around my slender waist (twenty inches my waist ribbon measured—ha! ha! just look at me *now*) and called me "his darling—his true little wife—his own dear helpmate!" It was a good deal of undertaking for us, dears, for we were both young, and expenses were heavy. All we had in the world was John's wages, though, to be sure, we were rent free, for the little bandbox of a house we lived in belonged to me, having been left me by my grandfather. We had, too, our little child's future to think of: it had always been my hope to be able to leave her something. But all con-

siderations, even those of our child's prospects, must fade before the touching appeal made us by this friendless, aged woman.

Well, a letter was written and despatched—a letter inviting poor Aunt Julia to come and stay with us as long as she lived, and enclosing her the money to pay her passage to New York (John had to work at outside jobs to get it), and in course of time she came to us—in course of a long, long time. One could not get to or from California as one can now, in a matter of three weeks or so. It took months. The winter had gone and the snow-flakes had melted, and the May blossoms had faded, and then the June roses came, and with them poor Aunt Julia. She was a fragile, delicate woman of past sixty, with mild blue eyes, which positively beamed, as my John's did, on every human creature on which they rested. Her voice was soft and low and mellow; and, alas! I saw at once what she said in her letter—that her home with us and on the earth, indeed, would not be for long.

Aunt Julia and I got on famously. Baby evidently regarded this new comer as a valuable importation brought expressly for her enjoyment. During the summer days Aunt Julia's life passed pleasantly as heart could wish. She and baby sat in the summer-house, which John proudly called a "Bos-key," somebody having told him that that was the French name for it. John built it himself, and I trained the vines to run over it and shade it; and if you'll believe me, in September, when the grapes were ripe (we had a vine in our own yard), the great black bunches hung through the lattice-work, and danced before your eyes and mouth as if they were actually inviting you to eat them. And, oh! how luscious they were, too! So ripe and sweet and juicy.

Aunt Julia spoke very little of her life in California, and out of delicacy I refrained from mentioning it. On one subject she was very bitter. Before she had applied to John (knowing him to be poor) she had asked two others, the sole remaining members of her family, to take her. They had both refused. John came gladly forward. That was nothing new for John. John was ready to assist everybody so far as his restricted means would allow; but Aunt Julia quite ignoring this fact, was as deeply grateful to her nephew as if the single act of goodness in John's life had been performed for her and her alone.

As the winter advanced upon us, poor Aunt Julia's health grew worse and worse from day to day. Her eyes had failed her, and she could, therefore, neither read nor write nor sew. "What shall I do to amuse you during the Christmas week, Aunt?" I asked.

"Talk to me, dear—talk to me! you talk like a book. I love to hear you talk. Talk to me."

"But I've got nothing to talk about now,

Aunty. We've talked over everything you know."

"Then make up something fresh, dear—make it up."

"I'll tell you what," said John, whose voice sounded exactly like his aunt's, except that her's was very *piano* and his thunderingly *forte*—but they were both in the same key and both sweetly harmonious, at least to my ear! "Nell, you're such a wonderful hand at telling stories! I hear you telling them to Baby all day long, about 'Once upon a time there was a little girl and she had a mother;' or, 'Once upon a time there lived a good man'—a circumstance to be faithfully narrated on account of its rarity. Now suppose you devote every evening of Christmas week to telling Aunty and me a story! Hey! What do you say to that?"

"That would be delightful," said Aunt Julia.

"Will you, Nell?" asked John.

I said of course I would, if I could amuse them. I would do anything for that purpose. They both knew that.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed John, slapping his leg as if this were a capital joke. "My little Nell giving us an Arabian night's entertainment. By jingo! ain't it jolly? I say Nelly, will you write it off during the day?"

"No," I replied, perking up my chin with a consciousness of rather a high order of talent, hitherto unrecognized; "no, I shall compose them as I go on—that is, extempore."

"Do so. Bravo!" shouted he again, this time rubbing his hands together in quite a frantic manner. "Do so. Do it, X—anyway, and then it will be all the better for Xmas—don't you see? Pick it and peck it, and mark it—don't you see? and then it will do for everybody—and me!"

The next evening was the first of the Christmas week. I had been thinking over our project all day, and when Baby was put to bed, and tea over, we all sat down quietly, and I was about to begin my story.

But, bless you! before ever I opened my lips I saw that John had got at least a half o' ream o' paper before him, and more newly sharpened lead pencils than I ever before saw collected together, and was ready and eager to write down every word I said.

I protested against this, but in vain. John would have his way. "I'm a reporter for a newspaper," he said, Aunt Julia laughing at his impudence. "I am obliged to report your speech, madam. Every great party has their speeches reported in the newspapers—particularly—if not more so, in ours. Our newspaper, Madam; our gigantic organ with a Hoc's Stop. The *Daily Blower*. Circulation, three million!"

"Now, John, this is too bad!" I exclaimed, "You'll put me out!"

"No I won't," he replied, "I'll put you in a book when you've done. Come now, don't be cross. What's your first story about?"

"Never mind," said I, still unmollified, and wishing to give this "reporter" as little "information" as possible, "it's about—something."

"I imagined it would be," said John.

II.

ABOUT SOMETHING.

"You must give it a name, Nell," said my husband. "Come, now, christen it at once, and Aunt Julia and I will stand as sponsors."

"I don't see why I need give it a name, John," I replied. "I haven't thought of one."

"Now look here, Madam," said John Morris, "if I do you the honor of taking down your stories with the ultimate view of—ahem—publishing them in book form—when I get money enough, the least you can do is to act on my reasonable suggestions. Every author does that."

"Very well," said I, "if it must be, it must. Call it

Roger Thornfield's Discovery.

"What did he discover, Nelly?" asked my husband, laughing a little at my dignified manner, so different now to what it was when I was cooking batter-cakes.

"Listen, and you will find out;" I answered gravely.

CHAPTER I.

"By Jove, Hartley! I believe you are going to be the lucky one after all."

"What! do you think she really likes me?"

"Likes you! You don't mean to say you haven't yet asked her if she loves you?"

"No; and I don't intend to do so!"

The answer was given in such a tone of decision that conversation at once dropped, and the two men pursued their way in silence. The chill air of a November night blew around the sharp angles of the street corners as the first speaker—a gay, volatile youth of twenty—stopped at a door whose polished surface, bright silver knob and knocker, with appropriate continuance of spotless marble steps, was the fac simile of the next house, and the one next to that, and indeed formed one of a row of bewildering similarity.

"Bless this stupid town!" exclaimed the younger man, inserting a small night-key in

the shining lock—"everybody abed at half past eleven! Good-night, Hartley."

"Good-night," answered Hartley; and turning up the collar of his overcoat, to protect his ears from the cold and damp air of the foggy night, he quickened his pace till it became nearer a run than a walk, and in less than ten minutes' time was warming his finger-tips at a cheery fire which threw out so bright a glow that gas-light was quite unnecessary in the room—one which formed the first of a suite of bachelor apartments.

A very handsome man this Mr. Arthur Hartley, now that his overcoat has been removed and his hat laid aside, showing his high forehead, and his glossy hair, and the soft tinge of his delicate, olive complexion, and the fine silky black moustache and whiskers encircling the well-shaped chin. Something of an Italian face—soft but not effeminate; an eye which could flash as well as plead; and a mouth a model of sweetness at times, now set with heavy lines, and drawn harshly down at the corners. A man of about thirty—perhaps a couple of years more; but in his moments of light-heartedness ten years of this seemed to vanish, and the face of a youth just "of age" was older than the face of Mr. Arthur Hartley.

The occupant of the suite of bachelor apartments was evidently not in a happy frame of mind; for, flinging himself moodily in a comfortable easy chair, he gave vent to his annoyance by a series of ill-repressed sighs.

"Of course she loves me—" he muttered in a low tone—"of course she loves me—anybody can see that. She loves me madly, devotedly, insanely. Curse the luck!"

It seemed a strange thing to curse the luck which brought the love of a beautiful young girl; but doubtless Mr. Hartley had reasons of his own for speaking as he did, and for continuing in the following strain:

"Curse this stupid hole of a town too—if it were anywhere else I might—no, *that* I could not exactly do; curse the town! New York's the only place in the world fit to live in!"

This was rather hard on London and Paris, and Vienna and Brussels, the which cities are generally supposed by their benighted inhabitants to be quite fit to live in; but as in this country one's thoughts are free, Mr. Arthur Hartley was quite entitled to the liberty of his opinion, particularly as it happened to be expressed in the solitude of his own apartments and not before witnesses.

"I suppose I must go to bed now," said Hartley, casting a glance at his watch and closing the hunting-case with a snap which fell on the ear like the sharp click of a diminutive pistol—"only half-past twelve and going to bed! Oh Lord! how supremely virtuous I am getting! I wish I could see what is going on in New York."

That he could not perform this visual feat seemed to be another cause of complaint against a life in Philadelphia, and Mr. Hartley entering an inner room, began divesting himself of his coat and waistcoat in a drearily discontented manner.

"I wonder if I dare go to see her to-morrow. Dare! One dare do anything with a woman who is madly, insanely in love."

He paused.

"Is she in love with me?"

Another pause.

"Yes, to be sure she is," answered Mr. Hartley to Mr. Hartley. "I wish I were as sure of everything as I am of that. Madly, insanely, furiously, outrageously, absurdly in love with me. And I can do anything I please with her. He chuckled at this and repeated the words—"anything I please with her."

Mr. Hartley did not quickly compose his restless brain to sleep. He tossed in the bed, and crumpled the white covers, and twisted the highly-fluted pillow-slips in his hot hands, and chuckled exultingly at the last little idea which had come across his fertile brain.

He repeated it in his waking intervals, which were many during the night; and the trim little chambermaid, who rapped at his door at 8 o'clock the next morning and announced boots and hot water, distinctly avers that she heard Mr. Hartley emphatically asserting that he could do—"anything—he—pleased—with—her."

CHAPTER II.

It is generally considered a fine thing to be born rich; and a fine thing to be born handsome; and better, perhaps than either, to be amiable and loving and beloved. All this was Ruth Villemain, and a very lucky girl she esteemed herself, when at the age of eighteen, just entering upon life,—its pleasures and its woes, she saw how unmistakably superior was her position to that of most girls about her. Her parents, both rich, died before Ruth had reached her sixth year, and from that age till womanhood the girl had been made to feel how great was the power conferred by fortune; and when, with this, dawned upon her the knowledge that great personal loveliness was hers as well, it might have been overlooked and pardoned if her head had been somewhat turned by the brilliancy of her position. But it was not so in the least. A more beautiful character, joined to a more lovely form and face, it would be difficult to find.

Indeed, part of her beauty, was derived from her charm of manner. Such a shy,

tender little way she had of supplicating your friendship by a loving glance from her soft, dreamy blue eyes! Such a warm smile dallied on her rosy lips, parted just enough to show the pearly whiteness of the teeth inside! Her form, too, more mature than is usual with girls of her years, was molded with a correctness seen but rarely now-a-days in this, our age, when bodily distortion is the rule to which women must fain submit.

There was nothing very brilliant in Ruth Villemain's mental qualifications. She had been a good little girl at school, and learned her lessons and got good marks and been obedient generally; and later on she had taken prizes for lessons, and then at length graduated. Not brilliantly at all, but she *had* graduated; and, so considered, she had performed the necessary and disagreeable scholastic duties incumbent on a young lady of her position in life. She said she did not rely on her brilliancy to be loved, but on the hopeful theory—that loving every one herself, all would love her in return—as we are told that like invariably begets like.

And it did in her case, very, very fully. Not one of the many persons who knew her even made the effort to withstand her power—the power of love, and truth, and virtue, and honor.

She had had many suitors and had rejected all who had offered themselves; but this with so much gentleness, tenderness, even affection, that not one among them had seen fit to be indignant, or scornful, or anything but just forever and ever her devoted friend and loyal knight. There were many who were this, too, without having offered themselves; and among these was one Roger Thornfield, a thoughtful young man of twenty-five, who had known Ruth Villemain to his pleasure, as a child, and now knew her, to his sorrow, as a woman. To his sorrow, because he too felt the influence which none could escape who came in contact with her; to his sorrow, because he knew that the day was not far distant when some *preux chevalier* would come prancing by on his figurative milk-white steed and capture the pretty little Pastoral maiden, Ruth Villemain.

As yet, however, Ruth did not seem likely to be captured. The figurative milk-white steeds pranced on the scene and off, and there was an end of them.

Seeing this, Roger Thornfield's great heart grew light and joyous, and one day, surveying his comely young face in his mirror, a smile flitted across his lips—a smile of joy—and he said gayly—"Can it be possible that dear Ruth could—could—"

Here his feelings were evidently too much for him, for his heart came high up in his throat and choked his utterance.

Ah hope! hope! springing eternal in the human breast, what flattering tales badst thou been whispering to poor Roger Thornfield?

Whatever they were, they soon faded and

died, for Roger's countenance lost its brightness, and an expression of anxiety—almost pain came across the pale but manly young face. "It is a hard thing to be poor," he soliloquized sadly—"a very hard thing to be poor—harder for a woman, of course, than a man; hard enough for a man, too, under any circumstances; but under these which surround me now, to know and feel that the iron hand of poverty has me, and will have me forever in its grip, while the woman I love is heiress to two fortunes, and can scarcely be approached by a man in my position without the fear of his being considered a fortune-seeker, and as such discarded, of course—oh, it is hard—hard—hard to bear."

That the man felt what he said was evident; for he buried his face in his hands, and a few hot tears trickled between his fingers, leaving their traces too on the yet unfurrowed cheeks.

"Come what may," said he, rising, "I will tell her that I love her. I will see what answer she will make. She cannot—it is impossible that she should for one moment doubt the disinterestedness of the love of her old friend, Roger Thornfield."

How well he knew the path from the little unfrequented northern thoroughfare, contiguous to unpleasant railways and verging closely on the confines of nowhere, bounded on all sides by roystering beer-gardens and bare-headed, ill-kempt children—from the place in fact which was his home, to the fine, wide, well-graded thoroughfare running from river to river, where stood the house, one of the legacies of Ruth Villemain, and now occupied by the girl and an invalid aunt—a suffering and rather ill-tempered lady, who had been transplanted from her native soil in the interior of the State, to the utterly congenial atmosphere (to her) of Philadelphia life.

"My dear," said the poor lady, in a constant state of protest against balls, and operas, and dinners, and theatres—"my dear Ruth, we never do this sort of thing in the country."

"No Aunt, I suppose not," replied the girl laughing; "but don't you sometimes wish you could?"

Roger Thornfield's timid ring at the entrance door was answered by a man servant, who had been lolling in easy indifference on a hall-way chair.

"Is Miss Villemain at home?" inquired Mr. Thornfield.

"I don't know, sir; but I'll see," was the answer; a palpable falsehood, for even as the words were being uttered, Ruth's merry laugh was heard in the drawing room.

The well-trained servant showed no token of being disconcerted at this incident, but, quietly entering the room where Ruth was sitting, inquired, in his usual lazy way, if "Miss Villemain was at home—to Mr. Thornfield!"

Miss Villemain answered in the affirmative

at once; but before the man had time to take the message Ruth stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Williams."

The man bowed and stood still.

"Oh no, no, Mr. Hartley," answered Ruth, in reply to some whispered words from that gentleman, who was sitting near her. "I can't send away my old friend Roger Thornfield."

Mr. Hartley bit his lip, and looked out of the drawing-room window into the conservatory beyond. "Show Mr. Thornfield in," said Miss Villemain; but even as she gave the order she looked up uneasily at her companion.

"I suppose you consider me very unreasonable, Miss Villemain," said the latter, when the servant was out of hearing distance.

"Yes indeed," answered Ruth, laughing, "very unreasonable to expect me to discard poor Roger, who never did you any harm—"

"Upon my word," said Hartley, assuming a sneering expression not very pleasant to see, "how poetical you are getting! You really recall souvenirs of Mother Goose!"

"What is it."

"Never did him any harm—"

"Ah, yes!"

"What a naughty boy was that
To drown poor pussy cat
Who never did him any harm,
But killed the rats in his father's barn—"

"Mr. Thornfield!" announced the servant, opening the drawing room door to admit the gentleman who had been the subject of discourse between Mr. Hartley and Miss Villemain.

"I am fortunate in finding you at home," said Roger Thornfield, bowing to the pretty girl who extended her hand kindly to him.

"Yes indeed," she replied; "one has so many engagements out, during the season."

"Bless me!" ejaculated Hartley with a surprised air; "is there a 'season' in Philadelphia?"

"To be sure there is, you rude man. I positively cannot allow you to villify our dear old town so much. Mr. Thornfield, Mr. Hartley—Mr. Hartley, Mr. Thornfield. Indeed, I don't know which of you is the greater personage, and therefore am in doubt which name to mention first in 'introducing.'"

"He is the greater personage who enjoys your greater friendship," said Thornfield, glancing up at her, full of the love which was the ruling sentiment of his life, and had been for ten years back.

"A compliment from you, Mr. Thornfield!" said Ruth, smiling. "I never expected it."

It was quite evident Mr. Hartley also did not expect it, for he looked excessively bored, and even ill tempered, at Roger Thornfield.

There was an awkward pause for a few seconds, during which Roger Thornfield looked very love-guilty, and Arthur Hartley continued to look very bored.

At length Mr. Hartley rose and said, "Miss Villemain, I take my leave."

"Must you go?" said she, rather anxiously, or so it seemed to Roger.

"I came first," replied Hartley, with a slight inclination of the head in the direction of Thornfield.

Ruth blushed as she remembered the conventional rule, and how completely she had overlooked it in her desire to keep Hartley by her side.

She rose, and her soft hand lingered a little while in his as he was going. Roger Thornfield looked at them as they stood together, and, although he was not any too well pleased at finding a stranger with Ruth on the very day he had come to make his love-avowal, he was too generous a fellow to deny in his own heart that this new comer was a most brilliant specimen of early manhood. Handsome, that was evident; witty, doubtless; rich, perhaps—altogether a very fascinating person. Was Ruth fascinated? Oh no, no, thought poor Roger, it cannot be.

It seemed something like it though, for, when the door closed Ruth sprang to the window and pulling aside the curtain, exclaimed "Oh, dear! Come look at Mr. Hartley's trap, Mr. Thornfield."

Roger cast a glance at the dashing equipage in which Mr. Hartley jumped, taking the reins from a knowing groom, attired in a livery of irreproachably good taste.

"He is saying something," said Ruth, as Mr. Hartley touched his hat, and dashed off at a rattling pace. "I wish I knew what he said," sighed she, coming away from the window.

The groom could have told her; for he told the smart chambermaid at Mr. Hartley's lodgings that when that gentleman left Miss Villemain's he repeated two or three times over, that he could do—any—thing—he—pleased—with—her!

"Charming person; did you not think so, Mr. Thornfield?" said this silly Ruth, sending herself abstractedly at the piano, and nervously running her fingers over the keys.

"Ruth," answered the young man looking steadfastly in her face, "we have known each other ten years, and this is the first day I ever heard you call me *Mr. Thornfield*. Will you tell me the reason of it?"

"Why, there is no reason at all—that is not particularly—only, before strangers, it does not sound so very familiar. I can't explain to everybody, can I, that I've known Roger Thornfield ten years and that because I've known Roger Thornfield ten years I call Roger Thornfield *Roger Thornfield*? There! does that satisfy you?"

He was not altogether satisfied; but her tone, half-petulant, half-joking, re-assured

him in part, and succeeded in bringing his chair closer to the piano stool.

"Ruth," said he, drawing a long breath. "I've got something very serious to say to you."

"Oh, Roger!" exclaimed the girl, giving a sudden twirl to the stool, thus bringing herself face to face with him; "oh, please don't say anything serious. I can't bear anything serious. Now there's Aunt—she's always serious—you are serious. I must say I do like Mr. Hartley, if for no other reason than that he is never serious. He is always light-hearted and happy and gay. I love people who are light-hearted and gay."

Poor Roger! He stood little chance of being loved just then by this token; for his pale young face was the very picture of despair.

"Ruth," he continued, nothing daunted, "I must speak to you to-day. That is, if you'll let me. May I?"

"Certainly, Roger," she answered naively. "What about—?"

"About—about—Ruth, did it never strike you how very dear you are to me?"

"Yes, Roger," she answered; "you are very good to me—so is every one about me; they all love me—even Aunt, I believe—that is, when she is well enough."

"But, Ruth, I don't want you to class me with the general throng. I am a plain man, and can make no flowery speeches. I think you know that I am honest and upright and sincere. So much I will say, although it sounds like self-praise. And, Ruth, I love you very, very deeply. I have done so ever since I knew what love was—yes, and before that period, too, when you were a sweet young child, and I was not many years your senior—even then you were dearer to me than any living, breathing thing on the face of the earth. Now, since I have come to be a man, I know that my whole life is centered in you, and that to possess your love would make me happier than any king who wields a scepter. I can't be eloquent, Ruth—it is not in me; but I feel—I feel what I say, God knows how deeply! Therefore, dearest, if you can find it in your heart to give me any hope that at some future time, by devotion or self-denial, or what you will, I may, oh, Ruth! possess your love, you can change a life, which hitherto has been nothing but one of sadness and misery, into an existence as bright and joyous as that of birds flitting about in the unchanging sunshine of a tropical clime."

His voice had quite died away before he looked up in her face for a reply. None came.

"Ruth," he repeated, after a pause—"Ruth, will you not answer me?"

Her only answer was a burst of tears, which frightened poor Roger to such an extent that he rushed to her, and throwing him-

self on his knees before her, begged her forgiveness for what he had said.

"Roger," she replied at length, wiping away the tears. "I have nothing to forgive—indeed it is I alone who am to blame. I should have shown you—"

"What?" he exclaimed, rising and pacing the floor excitedly—"that the difference between our relative positions is too great for me to aspire to your hand—that you are rich, and I poor?"

"No, no," she answered quickly; "nothing of the kind. Oh, Roger! why did you not speak thus to me three months ago? Then my answer would have been different. Of all the men I have ever known you were the one whom I always preferred until—"

Her voice sank, and she lowered her eyes as Roger Thornfield stopped pacing the floor and fixed a piercing gaze upon her face.

"Until what, Ruth?" he inquired at length.

She made no reply.

"Oh, Ruth," he said, "don't give me only half confidence. Kill me if so it must be, but do not let me linger in agony. Slay me at once."

"You must help me then, Roger," said the girl, sadly.

"Is it," he said, in a tremulous voice, "that you love some one else?"

"Yes, oh yes," she answered—"so dearly! so very, very dearly."

He shrank away from her as she uttered the words, and bowed his head in silence.

"You insisted on knowing, Roger," she said, perceiving his distress.

"It is better I should know," he answered. "Will you extend the confidence?"

"Yes."

"His name is—?"

"Arthur Hartley."

"What!" he exclaimed, springing up as if an electric battery had touched him. "The man who has just left us?"

She bowed her head in token of affirmation.

"Why, Ruth," said Roger. "I never heard of the man before to-day. Who is he?"

"I don't know," she replied.

"What is he?"

"I don't care."

"What is his parentage?"

"I never inquired."

"His antecedents?"

"I have to do with his future, not his past."

"Then you are fixed in this?"

"Yes, Roger, fixed as fate."

"You love him?"

"Oh yes, Roger, more, much more than I can ever tell you."

She clasped her hands together and cast her eyes upward, standing for some moments rapt in the ecstasy of a young girl's first love. This being, it was not strange that the

emotion which was racking the breast of poor Roger Thornfield passed without comment or observance on the part of Ruth Vilemain.

"That is Aunt's voice," said she, as the tones of a lady, complaining of the servants, were heard in the hall-way.

"Yes, Ruth, and I am in no mood to meet Mrs. Whining. You must forgive me for all I have said to you to-day. Believe me, if I had known your state of feeling, I never should have intruded upon you what must have been a very annoying avowal. But this much I will add to what I have already said: howsoever coldly you may regard me, my love for you will never change. It will last as long as I last, Ruth, and that perhaps will not be for a great length of time. Ruth, you are without male relatives of any kind. Will you let me—me, your old friend Roger Thornfield—will you let me be your brother?"

It was not a great deal to ask, but Ruth hung her head and was silent for a moment. At length, she answered,

"Brothers are—are so annoyingly zealous sometimes, Roger."

"Do you fear that zeal which shall be directed in a certain quarter, Ruth?"

"No," she answered, vehemently. "Be as zealous as you like; investigate, inquire, probe, look into—do what you please."

"And if the result of all this is unfavorable?"

"Roger," answered the girl with great gravity, and for the first time seeking his glance and meeting it boldly, "I love him; nothing can change me."

"And you will marry him?"

"Yes—if he asks me. He has not done so yet."

There was nothing to be said, and Roger said nothing. But he pressed her small hand very tenderly as he left her, and, with his eyes blinded with tears, rushed past Mrs. Whining in the hall, without even so much as bowing to the lady.

"How frightfully rude these healthy people are!" said Mrs. Whining entering the drawing-room with a languid step. "Now, my dear Ruth, there is your friend who has just left you—Mr. Rosefield—oh, no, I mean Thornfield—and a very nice person too, I dare say, only he is so very healthy—so intolerably strong, my dear. Not that I altogether blame him for it, but he is made of iron, Ruth. I have not the slightest doubt that a post mortem examination on the body of that young man would disclose nothing but iron. Did you hear how he banged the front door, my dear? Ah me! a few more such bangs as that will lay me in my grave!"

"Won't you lie down on this couch, Aunt?" said Ruth, drawing up a divan.

"Yes, dear—and if you would be good enough to fan me—that cushion—put it a

little higher—also salts; here, in my dress pocket—thank you! Not quite so violent with the fan. There, like that—yes, thank you. Do you know Ruth, dear, you are a charming girl—so many delightful qualities you know. But you have one which is perfectly invaluable to me. Can't think what it is, do you say? Well, I'll tell you—you never thump chairs."

A bitter smile crossed Ruth's features, as the languid lady sank back again on the couch, crushing the rich paraphernalia of her toilette and making a coverlid of her gaudy Cashmere shawl. Ruth plied the fan constantly, however, and once or twice placed the flagon of salts under the delicate nostril of the invalid lady.

"To tell you," said the latter, opening her eyes, and holding on high a thin white finger literally sparkling with gems—"to tell you how I appreciate a person who does not thump chairs is quite out of my power! Why, do you know what my brother—your poor dear father, Ruth—do you know what he died of? He died of the thump of a chair. He did, truly, my dear. He wasn't very well one day, and some wretched healthy person came in to see him, and thumped a chair, whereupon your father instantly expired. Can you now understand why it is so unpleasant to me, to be in contact with healthy people?"

"But, dear Aunt," said Ruth, in a tone of apology, and as if the avowal was one which reflected great discredit on herself. "I am a very healthy person."

"Yes, you are, Ruth. But at least you are a considerate person. It was the same way with my husband, Mr. Whining; he was a very healthy person; save for that, he was a gentleman. He saw it was impossible for so much health to get along with so much illness, and one day was thrown off his horse, and died from his injuries. He never could have died in any other way, dear, he was so strong. It was rather unfeeling in him, perhaps, to give me the violent shock of seeing him brought home dead; but the horse slipped, it appears, and therefore it was not altogether Mr. W—'s fault. I felt his death, of course, very much; but I must say I should have respected his memory more if he had not been so very healthy. Why, do you know, my dear," continued the widow, partly rising, supporting her delicate frame on her elbow, and lowering her voice as if she were telling some thrilling "sensation" story, "he never took a blue pill in his life!"

Ruth bit her lip to preserve her gravity, which was always sadly imperiled when Mrs. Whining began the recital of her retrospective wrongs. She felt, however, that it was incumbent on her to coincide in denouncing this reprehensible conduct on the part of the defunct Mr. Whining, and was wondering in what terms she should couch

her feelings, when her aunt spared her all further trouble by continuing:

"In my opinion, people are very unwise to marry. Marriage, Ruth, is so unpleasantly healthy. It entails, also, such numberless disagreeable events. The proprietorship of a joint apartment, for instance; could anything be more annoying? You go to look for your personal effects, and you come across the unpleasant personal effects of a man. Boots abound—hats flourish, and trousers hang their slow length along in every cupboard. And then the man himself, Ruth! A great rough, healthy being, who is legally licensed to kiss you whether you like it or not, and pull your head down on his breast, thereby rumpling your hair!—an unpleasant financial machine too, who labors under a perpetual state of "shortness" "down town," which of course produces a corresponding "shortness" in your own financial operations "up town." Oh, marriage is so unpleasant, my dear—that's the only word for it—so very, *very* unpleasant."

Ruth said it must be unpleasant, but as she had not tried it she did not know.

"But talking of unpleasant things," said the invalid, her dull eyes actually brightening with the interest of the subject, "did it ever strike you what a very unpleasant part of the community little babies are? I mean even prior to the age when banging doors and thumping chairs forms the amusement of their days, and to a certain extent the pastime of their nights; previous to that they have stomach aches, and on their first entrance in the world, on the making of their first toilette, pins prick them, then they cry. I wonder, now, if some mathematical genius or philosopher—or rather some philanthropist—could not demonstrate to babies that crying is of no use in their infantile woes! It does not relieve stomach aches, neither does it remove pins. Therefore, why cry? Do you not think this fact could be shown to any reasonable baby, Ruth, dear?"

"I am afraid, aunt, the philanthropist would have great trouble in making the baby understand what he was talking about."

"And therefore, my dear, therefore do I say that babies, of all the human species, are the most unpleasant portion—babies and men, dear. Women, even healthy women, I can tolerate. Ah me! I shall be ill from having talked so much. Would you oblige me by ringing for my maid, Ruth? Pull the bell twice—she will know it is for her. If there is anything I can't bear, it is a great healthy man servant tumbling in to know what you want."

A white-capped, coquettish little French maid answered the summons, and with the dexterity of long practice began assisting the lady to arise.

"Is my room properly aired, Louise," asked Mrs. Whining.

"*Oui Madame*," was the reply.

"You did not thump any chairs or bang the door while I was out, did you?"

"*Non Madame*."

"Very good. But oblige me by answering in a lower tone. Indeed, when your answer is to be a monosyllabic affirmative or negative, why utter any sound whatever? When you wish to say 'yes' just nod your head, with a slight courtesy. When you wish to say 'No' shake your head also with an accompanying courtesy. Do you understand me?"

"*Oui Madame*."

"There, see how little attention you pay to my instructions! Why did you speak? However, give me your arm and help me up stairs. Stairs, Ruth, are a very unpleasant part of a house, but that's neither here nor there. What I wish to say to you is this; though to be sure I am a poor creature, dependent on your bounty, (but know of course that my society is more than an adequate return for all that I receive) still I love you, Ruth. In the intervals of my medicine, when I have nothing else to do, I frequently think of you. And I often wonder what will be your fate. Knowing mankind as I do, my dear, I can only hope and pray that you will not marry. If you do, marry an invalid—a sick man, who will keep his bed and won't bother you. Of all husbands, dear, I should think an invalid would be the least unpleasant. But my advice to you is, never marry at all, Ruth—never marry at all."

Ruth Villemain heard the words and sat pondering over them for fully an hour after her aunt left the room. In substance Roger Thornfield had given her the same advice—and now in her shuffling, drawing way her aunt had reiterated it. These two people of all the world were perhaps the only ones to whose counsel she would hearken, or to whom she would give her confidence in return. Why was it therefore that their advice fell unheeded now, when before it would have been received as words of wisdom?

Because the mad fever which we call love, had seized the girl's brain, and wrought there delirium of the wildest kind. She loved Arthur Hartley; for him she had resolved to sacrifice everything—everybody—if needs were. What was poor Roger Thornfield compared to him? What, her aunt? What, all the world?

Perhaps then, after all, there was not so much braggadocio about it, as Mr. Hartley—at that very moment sipping wine with a friend at a fashionable restaurant—muttered between his teeth, thinking of Ruth, that he could do—

"Any thing—he—pleased—with her."

CHAPTER. III.

ROGER THORNFIELD left Ruth's presence under the influence of two very strong feelings. The first was of course his love for her—that neither her refusal of him nor her passionate avowal of love for another could change in the slightest degree. All hope of ever aspiring to the bliss of being her husband had vanished. She had said it could never be, and thus he knew he might not even hope for the future. But oh! it was heart-breaking to remember she had said, that had he pressed his claim three months before—ere this man Hartley had crossed her path—her answer would have been different. Fool! fool that he was! Why had he not been less tardy? He loved her then as dearly as now; he had failed to speak, a new sentiment had filled her breast, and now Roger Thornfield's doom was sealed.

Next to the overweening bitterness that this knowledge brought, came an unquenchable desire to know something more of the man who had succeeded in obtaining the love of this pure and beautiful girl. It was evident his history was unknown to Ruth Villemain; she in her blind love had never inquired into his past, and would doubtless resent what she called "annoying zeal," if she saw any show of "probing Hartley's antecedents" on the part of her old friend. This, however, did not deter Thornfield from making an inward vow that he would not rest quiet, day or night, until he obtained some knowledge of the character of the man whose wife Ruth—his sweet young friend, the woman he so devotedly worshipped—had avowed herself willing to become, and that too, merely for the asking.

How was this to be accomplished? How was it possible for poor young Thornfield, without resources of money or power, confined by business the greater part of the day in the quiet and respectable city of Philadelphia, to learn any thing of the habits or haunts of this gay New Yorker who had merely visited Philadelphia for a "joke" in the first place, met Ruth Villemain by accident, and since that time made a few flying visits to the town avowedly (so he told Miss Villemain's friends), of being near the lady whose charms had had so potent an effect on the handsome Hartley. True, he had taken a bachelor's suite of apartments and comfortably installed himself, so as to avoid those "horrid caravanseries" the hotels, when he did come to Philadelphia, which was seldom. Thornfield's acquaintance in New York was of the most limited character. A few steady-going mercantile men who did business with the house in Philadelphia to which Thornfield was attached, heads of families whose lives were passed between the busy street "down town," where they transacted busi-

ness, and the quiet little cottage somewhere out of town to which they retired after business hours. It was hardly likely these people could furnish any information of the handsome butterfly man whose gaudy wings had attracted Ruth. On application, Roger found what he had fully expected—that no one knew any thing about Mr. Arthur Hartley.

Since the day of her confession to him, Thornfield had never crossed the threshold of Ruth Villemain's door. He felt, as yet, that he was too unnerved to meet her. Besides, what availed such meetings? Hartley's hold on her affections was without doubt strengthening every day, and Roger, powerless to show this man in another form than that in which he showed himself, knew well that any foreboding of a lack of honesty or uprightness, unbacked by authentic proof, would be laughed to scorn by the infatuated girl. Thornfield's love for her was one of self-denying purity, and had he once been convinced that this man Hartley was worthy the enviable position he was to occupy as the husband of the young heiress, Roger Thornfield would have been the first to go to his long-time friend and congratulate on her choice. For now it was currently reported that Ruth and Hartley were engaged, and would shortly be married. The news had spread like wild fire, and been received first with astonishment, then with disbelief; and then, when disbelief was no longer possible, with great disdain, by Ruth's aristocratic friends. Who was this man? Who knew him? Nobody; and strange to say, Thornfield's misgivings of his previous good character were shared by every one who met him. By every one except Ruth who, it was said, became more and more attached to him every day.

Thornfield's sole pleasure, now that this great blight had fallen on his life, and his visits to Ruth had ceased, was to seat himself opposite her door on a stone bench in the Park, which fronted her house. Here he could see her coming and going; driving with Hartley every day, and accompanied by him and her aunt, Mrs. Whining, going about some gawdy every evening. Hartley's visits were constant; and every one who had expressed himself—or herself—in unfavorable terms of the affianced husband—was pretty well excluded from the house. One evening Thornfield sat at his post, regardless of a rain which was coming down quietly but steadily, and drenching him from head to foot, when he saw Hartley drive up to the door, fling the reins to the groom, who cleared away at a rattling pace. Hartley was evidently "in" for a long evening of it.

"Poor Ruth," muttered Roger between his teeth.

Absorbed by his bitter reflections, Thornfield failed to observe that the stone bench on which he sat, held another occupant beside himself. This occupant was a young

woman with a handsome painted face, a pair of bold black eyes, and a luxuriant, untidy head of hair. Her dress was composed of costly materials, but the rain of to-night and the neglect, perhaps of weeks, had rendered it the reverse of handsome. She made one or two efforts to attract the attention of the sad-looking young man who sat gazing fixedly on the house across the way, but finding they were fruitless, she moved along the bench noiselessly, and, without speaking, laid her delicate white hand lightly on his shoulder.

Roger started and looked around to find the bold, black eyes peering deep into his, and the painted, handsome lips within a finger's length of his own. Instinctively he shrank from this woman and turned his back on her. The rain was pouring down heavily now, and spite of the aversion which one glance at her had caused him, Thornfield could not help feeling compassion for a wretch whose only home probably was in the pitiless streets. His eyes wandered to the right and to the left, in front and back of the bench where they sat; beside themselves there was not a human being to be seen. Across the street, Ruth's shutters jealously closed, herself inside with the worthless man she had chosen, while the pure young heart which loved her through all, Roger Thornfield, the friend of her youth, sat on a cold stone bench in the dripping rain, side by side with a painted midnight tramp!

He hoped she would go. But that he did not wish to speak to her, he would have offered her charity and told her to go. While he was deliberating whether he should say so much to her, she spoke to him.

"I want about half an hour's conversation with you. Can I have it?"

"No," he said. "I'll give you charity if you want it, but go away from me."

"I don't want your charity, as you call it," she answered bitterly. "I suppose you mean money. God knows it's little enough of any other charity I get."

He did not answer. There was a pause for a moment—broken by the woman.

"Why don't you go there any more?" she said, pointing to the house opposite.

"Where?" said Thornfield.

"Oh, you know well enough what I mean. To the house opposite. I have been hanging about this park longer than you have, and I know you used to go there often, and one day you came away looking very wretched, and you have not been there since. Has he driven you off?"

Thornfield rose to go.

"You're a fool to try to get away from me," continued this woman in a low tone; "I could tell you something now you'd give your eyes to know."

"What about," asked Roger, still walking on while the woman followed at his side.

"What about? Why about *him*, to be sure. What do I care for anybody else?"

"About that man, do you mean! About Arthur Hartley?" said Roger, whose interest was now fully awakened.

"Arthur Hartley! That's what he calls himself, is it? Yes, about Arthur—what was it—oh yes, Hartley! and a very pretty name, too. That's his Philadelphia name."

"Has he any other, then?" asked Thornfield with breathless anxiety.

"Oh ho!" said the woman with a coarse laugh. "That wakes you up, does it? I thought you didn't want to talk to me—a poor wretch out all alone in a dark, rainy night. Where shall we go? In here?"

They were standing before the door of a "lady's restaurant," one of the best in Philadelphia. Roger looked up and shrank back. He shuddered at being seen in the company of this painted creature with the dripping dress.

"I'd rather not," he said hastily. "I'd rather go somewhere where we can talk privately. If you are tired or hungry go in. Here is some money. I'll wait for you outside."

"I never feel either fatigue or hunger when I'm after my revenge. I don't want your money, I tell you; I'm after my revenge." She clenched her hands together as she spoke, and, in the stillness of the dark night, Roger heard the sharp grinding of her white teeth.

"Where can we go?" he said, hopelessly.

"Why don't you take me to your rooms," she answered roughly, "you have got some rooms somewhere, haven't you?"

Roger thought of the quiet lodgings kept by a pious Quakeress, a widow woman with half a dozen young children. No, no, he could not take her there.

"I suppose you would not like to go to the garret where I live," said she.

Thornfield hesitated. This woman might be leading him into a trap. She might be leagued with a gang of robbers and ruffians. Should he go with her—to his doom, perhaps? Why not? What had he to lose? The little money he earned from month to month constituted his only earthly fortune, and as for his life, what was that worth to him since Ruth Villemain loved another?

"I will go with you," he said.

They walked off silently, for their way was through unfrequented thoroughfares where no cars were running. A weary journey over hillocks of bricks and debris of demolished houses—through back alleys, whose effluvia was oppressive and overwhelming—out beyond the town to the open country—and at length the woman stopped before the door of a wretched looking hovel.

"Go in," said she pushing the door on its rusty hinges.

Roger Thornfield, the model young man of

the great business house of C— & Co., groped his way up the creaking staircase closely followed by the painted midnight tramp he had met in the park, on the rainy night.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT same rainy night, after Mr. Hartley had driven up to Ruth's door and flung his reins to the smart groom, he entered the large drawing-room of this fine house, and enquired for Miss Villemain.

"Be down in a minute, sir," said Williams. "Dear me, sir! your overcoat is quite wet! I'll take it down stairs to dry."

The man, leaving the room, met Mrs. Whining, to whom he gave a respectful bow.

"My dear Hartley," said the lady advancing to meet the handsome New Yorker, "I knew it was you! I said to Ruth: 'My dear, do you hear how lightly that door is shut? That's Hartley. Hartley never bangs. I never knew Hartley to thump in my life. Hartley is a treasure. Outside of a bedridden party, who can be made over to paid nurses at once, I don't know of any one who will annoy you less, as a husband, than Hartley. Hartley, to use some of the horrid slang of the day, Hartley is the Ace of Clubs.'"

"My dear Mrs. Whining!" exclaimed Hartley, "how black you are making me! Why am I the Ace of Clubs, pray?"

"I don't mean that," replied the lady sinking into an arm-chair. "I've got it confused. I knew I should. I mean a 'trump.' I never played cards but once. It bores me to fix my mind on stupid little pieces of painted pasteboard. On the solitary occasion of which I speak, it was observed that the Ace of Clubs happened to be frequently the trump. So I got it confused. Pray overlook the mistake."

"Will Ruth soon be down?" asked Hartley, who seemed restless and uneasy.

"Yes, in a minute. Her maid was at her hair when I came down. I would not have that maid if she would come to me for nothing. Such a noisy creature, and sticks the hair pins into one's head frightfully. My maid is bad enough. But they are all alike—they will talk. I hate talking. I never would go to the theatre if I could help it, except when they play pantomimes and ballets. No talking, you know. Even then, they play horrid, noisy, distracting music. What a very unpleasant thing music is!"

"How confoundedly long Ruth stays!" said Hartley, rising from his seat and pacing the floor abstractedly.

"That's her maid's fault! The poor girl is positively the abject slave of that woman when she's at her hair. If Ruth tells her to hurry, she sticks pins in her head. If she tells

her of that, she pulls her hair out. 'Accidental,' did you suggest? No such thing; it's malice—pure spite."

Hartley made no reply, but kept looking anxiously at the door.

"Hartley!" continued Mrs. Whining, "if you had the remotest idea how nervous you make me by gazing at the door in that distressed manner, I am sure you would desist at once. I'm going now, because I hear Ruth's rustling dress on the stairs. I hate silks because they rustle, which is unbearable."

"Don't let me chase you away, Auntie," said Ruth, entering with a happy smile, and extending her little dimpled hand to Hartley.

"Dear, I wouldn't stay for worlds! You are going to bill and coo here, and that I positively cannot stand. All the emotions—even the pleasurable ones—are most distressing to my nerves. Joy, for instance, is such a noisy emotion! I can't bear it. Grief, when very subdued, is much less offensive. Please kiss me very lightly, Ruth. I so dislike a hearty good-night smack, what wretched vulgar people called a 'buse.' Ta-ta, Hartley. Good-night. I'll see you to-morrow."

She never saw him again.

"My darling wife," said Hartley, as the door closed on Mrs. Whining.

"Not yet, Arthur," said the girl, seating herself on the sofa beside him. "But soon, very soon."

He was silent.

"Arthur! How pale you look to-night! What is the matter?"

"Nothing, dearest," he replied, passing his hand over his forehead, on which drops of perspiration were standing, though the night was not a warm one.

"There is something wrong. Ah, Arthur! can you keep anything from me, your own little Ruth?" He put his arm about her waist and, leaning over, kissed her fresh young lips.

"I would tell you at once, dearest, except that it is a horrid business affair—"

"Business, Arthur!" she repeated, "I thought you were not in business."

"Well, it is not business in the usual acceptance of the term, and yet it *is* business, too, of a certain sort. In fact, it's about—about—"

"About money?" she asked.

"Well, yes—about money."

"I knew it," she said, "money is always causing trouble."

There was a pause for a moment, and then the pretty girl wound her arms tenderly about Hartley's neck, and, whispering in his ear, said—

"Arthur!"

"Well, Ruth."

"Let me furnish this money."

"Nonsense, child—you don't know how large the sum is."

"I'm sure I don't care how large it is!"

I've got plenty of money. There were some heavy payments made me last week. Come, say you will take it from me."

If she had had more experience of the world, especially the world of badness—if she had been less infatuated with this man, she would have seen at once that this was the very point to which he had been leading her, and that he now smiled triumphantly at her folly.

"First let me explain the affair," he said. "You see, Ruth, I'm unfortunately endowed with a little bit of mechanism they call a heart—deuced tender, you know. Perfect fool I've been, or I should have been—well, rich as—What d'ye call em—Cresus—this day. Still you know—I would not change my heart, would you? No, of course not; I thought you'd say so. Well, about three months ago, one of my school-mates—good fellow as ever lived, only will get perpetually into scrapes—came to me and said, 'Arthur my boy! I want your name on the back of that paper. Just for form's sake, you know. You'll never hear a word about it again, and it will help me to negotiate'—you understand, don't you, Ruth—how business men accommodate one another? Oh, don't you? Well, I'll explain it some day or another to you. However, having full belief in his honesty, I endorsed the note, and 'pon honor, the bill falls due to-morrow, and I've just this minute heard that he has run off to Europe, and that they'll come down on me for the money—fifteen thousand dollars. Isn't it dreadful, Ruth!"

"How can men be so dishonest," said the girl, drinking in his foolish story with perfect belief in its veracity.

"The worst of it is that my father—never mentioned to you that I had a father? Why yes, my dear girl, I did—didn't I? Well, that's funny! Of course I've got a father. Where does he live? Oh, at New York—and New England. He'll be mad enough to kill me when he hears of it, and ten to one won't come down with the dust at all, but just let me sweat for it. Oh, this is why I never mentioned him to you. At least I think it is. Didn't want to hurt your feelings, you know. But he's as mad as blazes because I'm marrying a Philadelphia girl; wanted me to marry a foreign woman with a title. Stupid pride, isn't it? I always said so—especially for Americans. All well enough for Europeans, who hold so much to that style of thing. In the meantime just think of it—fifteen thousand dollars!"

"Let me draw you a draft for this money, Arthur," said Ruth, rising and crossing to her rosewood *Secretaire*.

"Oh, you darling girl!" said Hartley, hugging his affianced bride with great fervor, but kissing her rather abstractedly, for he was thinking about this money and the means of getting it.

"Stop Ruth," he said, "I tell you what will be better than that. It will look rather funny for me, I'm afraid, to be drawing a lot of money on your draft. People are so cursed ill-natured! Just like 'em to say 'What the dickens is Hartley drawing her money for, before they are married?' No stopping their beastly tongues. The way we can manage it is this—if you really insist on my taking this money." She assured him lovingly that she did. "Well then, I'll come for you in a hack to-morrow at ten, and then we can drive to the bank, you can draw your money—ah, and give it—ah—to me—and I'll take the eleven o'clock train, arrive in New York at two, up town and make my payment before three, and then I am all O. K. Excuse slang, darling. One contracts these horrid phrases among—ah—you know—business men."

"And when will you return, dear Arthur?" asked Ruth.

"Oh—return—shortly of course—very shortly. The next day or same evening—yes to be sure, the same evening. And you know Ruth, soon as ever I have a streak of luck—no, I don't mean that, but when dad pays up my—my half-yearly income, derived from—oh, dear child, this must be stupid to you, and I hate business, too. But what I mean is that—the money shall be returned to you."

She would not allow him to speak of that, she said, and if the truth must be confessed, he seemed very glad of it. He referred to the subject once again during the evening.

"Think it will excite attention, your drawing such a large amount, Ruth?" he asked.

"No, I have no one to question me, nor of whom I must ask leave. But if those payments had not been made last week I don't believe I could have got so much money at a moment's notice."

Mr. Hartley devoted at least half an hour to desperate love-making, which was interrupted by Williams, the man servant, who, after rapping lightly, looked in with rather a nervous expression of face quite unusual to the easy going *valet*.

"Please Miss," he said, "here's Mr. Thornfield outside very excited, saying he must and will see you to-night, he don't care how late it is."

Ruth looked at Arthur, as if to ask what reply she should make. Arthur replied for her.

"Tell Mr. Thornfield he can't come in."

"Mr. Hartley says you can't come in," said Williams to Thornfield, who stood in the hall outside.

"Does he?" yelled Thornfield, pushing past the man, rushing into the drawing room, and planting himself before Hartley. "Now let Mr. Arthur Hartley (as he chooses to call himself) say the same to me!"

"My dear Miss Villemain," said Hartley, turning coolly to Ruth, "is this—ah—your Quaker friend—or, ah—an Italian brigand?"

"Mr. Thornfield," said Ruth coldly, "will you be good enough to explain this conduct?"

"I will, Ruth," said Thornfield—"Oh my poor girl, how it will make you suffer! Read that letter, Ruth—it will convince you of this man's perfidy better than I can. It tells its own story."

Ruth took the letter and looked at it. "It is in your handwriting, Arthur," she said. She thought she saw his lips tremble and his cheek blanch slightly; nevertheless his tone was firm enough as he replied:

"Is it? Then read it, Ruth. Read it—if it is in my handwriting." She read aloud:

"DEAR CAROLINE:

"Why will you make an idiot of yourself in this way? Can you not see that I am playing a deep game with this girl, Ruth Villemain. Come on, and spoil all by your foolish jealousy, do! What if you have heard I was going to marry her? *How can I?*"

"My idea is to worm a good big sum of money out of her, get clear off, and then let her whistle for her 'bridegroom.' Don't you see?"

"I enclose you twenty-five dollars. Go buy yourself a pound of sweetmeats at Mail-lard's and when I make the *haul* in question I'll buy you a handsome diamond ring at Tiffany's; so keep that cursed black Indian blood of yours under control, and believe me when I tell you that, spitfire as you are, you please me better than any woman I ever met."

"No signature," said Ruth in a trembling voice.

"By George, I'm sorry for that," said Hartley, taking the letter deliberately from her hand; "if my signature had been attached, I should have placed this in the hands of the proper authorities to-morrow; but as it is;—and he scanned it very closely, for Mr. Hartley said he was quite near-sighted—" as it is, I pronounce it only a very stupid forgery."

"A forgery!" repeated Thornfield and Ruth in the same breath.

"A—forgery!" said Mr. Hartley, conclusively.

"*You lie!*" shrieked a fierce voice from outside. There was a struggle, and a noise, as of a scuffle. The door was flung open, and the handsome, painted woman, whom Roger Thornfield had met in the Park, stood in a defiant attitude, with her dripping dress and her untidy hair, in Ruth Villemain's drawing room.

"Do you dare to deny me, *your wife!* you base wretch?" screamed this woman, addressing herself to Hartley.

It only required one glance at him as he shrank cowering among the cushions of the sofa, to see that she was what she proclaimed herself. His self-possession had entirely left him now. It was evident that this woman's influence over him was great—either good or bad—it was great.

"George Hackley," she said, frowning darkly at him, "you are the meanest wretch that walks the earth. You're a gambler and a thief and a liar. I was an innocent girl when you got hold of me. See what I am now. I didn't care how much you cheated men. I helped you at it. But you shan't ruin any more women if I can prevent it. You've sent one to perdition—that's me—and that's enough. Come, get up, and go with me. You'd better. Bad as I am, I'm the only friend you've got."

The man seemed to feel this, for he obeyed her passively, and without casting a glance at either Ruth or Thornfield, he skulked, like a coward cur, out of the house of which he had been but a few moments before virtually the master.

"I've done you the best turn you ever had done you in your life," said the woman turning to Ruth; "the more you hear of him the more you'll thank me. But I did it willingly, because you're a woman. As for you, Mr. Thornfield, I'll never forget you. You've treated me with decency—as I've not been treated since—" pointing her finger the way in which Hartley had gone—"since I met him. I feel grateful. I wish you good-bye. You seem an honest, well meaning young man. Keep away from such women as I am, and you'll remain so."

She left them.

When Roger turned to Ruth he found she had fainted. He rang the bell, placed her in the hands of her frightened maid, and then returned to his distant lodgings.

It was three years before Roger Thornfield saw Ruth again. She and her aunt left for Europe the day after the affair, and Roger made up his mind she would marry abroad. He applied himself valiantly to his business, and by dint of industry, talent and perseverance, he became head of the house in which he had formerly been employed. He heard that Ruth had lost her fortune through the dishonesty of an agent. He did not know if this was true, but one day he met her quite unexpectedly in the street, and asked her: She said yes, it was true she was reduced to comparative poverty.

About three months afterward, he asked her another question. I scarcely know what she replied to this, but if you feel interested in the matter you might go on to Philadelphia and ask her. You must inquire for Mrs. Roger Thornfield, though, or you will not be likely to find her.

III.

ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE.

"WHAT'S your story about to-night, Nell?" asked John, so soon as tea was over, and we had all got comfortably seated.

"It is the story of how a woman loved, was doubted, tested, and—"

"Proved true?" asked Aunt Julia.

"That the sequel will show, Auntie. John, I've dubbed it

Minnie's Ordeal.*

It was between five and six o'clock one evening in the month of May, and the well-organised inhabitants of the little village of Marstown were one and all engaged in their evening meal. Not that the evening meal was in common, or that any one family had whatsoever to do with the evening meal of the neighbor; far from it. But in a quiet, hum-drum place like Marstown, there was very likely to be a similitude of habits, accompanied, in almost every case, by a similitude of tastes. It had been a lovely day. The cool, fresh breeze of the morning, wafting across the fields the delicate odor of newly-born flowers, had been chased away, it is true, by the heat of a noon-day sun, which was not so unbearable in itself as it was rather threatening in its promises of the scorching rays it was going to send, in a month or two later; but as early as three o'clock in the afternoon the glorious orb of light, seemingly satisfied with the undoubted taste of his quality which he had graciously vouchsafed the Marstown villagers, retired majestically behind some heavy clouds, and was seen no more that day.

And now that the daylight itself was fading out, and the soft gloaming settling down tranquilly on the white-fronted houses of Marstown, throwing the tall church-steeple in gloom first, and never stopping till even the grassy lanes were a tone or two darker in shadow, and from grass-green had become green-invisible, now was the time to see Marstown at its best. Not the time for a strict utilitarian to see it at its best—oh, no! The time for that was several hours earlier, when the men were in the fields, and the little store-keepers of the one village-street busy with what petty traffic the place afforded; when if you only took the trouble to cast a passing glance into neat kitchens, the doors of which stood invitingly open, you were sure to see busy housewives engaged in some interesting study of gastronomical combinations, coupling theory with practice in a thoroughly scientific manner. And one

* The reader is requested to overlook the very apparent anachronism of this story.

and all—plough-man and plough-horse, and shop-keeper, and post-mistress, and housewife, and children, and little dogs, and even some rather high-minded cats roused to a sense of their own indolence by seeing the activity of every body about them—all were busy. That was the time for the utilitarian to come.

But for you and me, who have enough of business and utilitarianism in town, and who like to run down into the country occasionally and throw off our cares, and scribble a few verses about "lover" and "lover," and "rill" and "hill," who are prone to think ourselves very ill-used the first day we come, because fate has decreed that we shall not inhabit this Arcadia the year through; and who before the end of the first week of our staying there, have so completely changed our ideas that we are wishing the time of our vacation over, so that we may get back to town again—you and I would see Marstown at its best in the evening.

It struck Robert Holden as being a very pretty place as, later on this quiet afternoon in May, he wended his way up the village-street, having as yet not so far lost his city habits as to be able to muster up an appetite for a five o'clock "tea."

He leaned to rest on the heavy stick which he carried in his right hand, and surveyed the scene around him. Before him was the church where his mother had been married, and where beneath one of those grey-stone slabs she lay at rest forever; in front of the church the time-honored flag-staff which he had so often attempted to climb, as a boy, and been rewarded for his manifold efforts by as many tumbles down on to the soft, grassy carpet beneath. The flag-staff had been in great requisition during the past four years, and had never borne the Starry Standard with a prouder air than the day on which the hero of the village—the great financial personage of Marstown, the only man in the county who had joined the army as a first "thirty-days" man, and never left it until he took tea with some cousins of his in Richmond; that old flag-staff creaking in the wind never flaunted out the brilliant hued banner so gaily as on the glorious day when Robert Holden returned to the quiet town;—temporarily not quiet, for drums were being beat for glory, and children being ditto for naughtiness, and fire-crackers were spitting and spluttering at Robert's feet, and every man and woman in the place was "God bless"-ing him, and poor Holden was a happy man for the time, spite of that deep trouble which he must bear every week and every month, and every day, and every hour, until the moment should come for him to join his mother in the churchyard. He was thinking of this trouble as he stood leaning on the heavy stick, and then he resumed his painful walk.

It was not all for nothing that Robert

Holden had been a thirty-days man, and that his thirty days had lasted till he entered Richmond with Grant's army. His uniform had got very rusty and shabby long before Gettysburg; and at Gettysburg he received an ugly wound in his thigh, which fortunately didn't make amputation necessary, but which in healing had shrivelled up one of his legs until it was some inches shorter than the other, making him limp painfully, and having at the same time a distressing effect on his general health. In about a month after he was about again he was detailed for picket-duty, and lo! a bullet from nowhere, seemingly, shattered his left arm, and made him again an inmate of a military hospital. The arm had to go; and now Robert Holden, with only one arm, lame, and bearing withal the burthen of unceasing ill-health, walked up the principal street of Marstown and silently bemoaned his fate.

In some respects his fate seemed a pleasant one. He was by all odds the richest man in Marstown. His father had amassed something which, even in these days of almost Sardanapalan luxury, looked very like a fortune. The last voyage his father had taken (for he was a sea-captain and had perished with his vessel, one stormy night, off the Bahama Islands); even this voyage had brought its pecuniary fruits to the then young lad, Robert Holden. His mother had left him a fine farm, in the adjoining county, which brought in a good round sum as a yearly rent. The ground on which the grocery and dry-goods store stood was his; and all that rich land there to the left—oh, far beyond the fence—that too was his; and last, but perhaps best, the house and grounds, both in such capital condition, where Holden now made his home, were his.

Of late, too, a greater source of happiness than any lands, or houses, or cows, or grocery stores, seemed opening for the crippled hero. His nature was a very self-contained one, and up to the age of twenty-five, his love for his mother had been all-sufficient for him; and then she died, and then came war, and now Robert Holden found himself in his thirtieth year with some few gray hairs shining here and there among his soft brown curls (for he belonged to a family who grew gray very early), and until very recently had never thought of love and marriage. The man's nature was a retiring one; there was a dearth of marriageable girls in the village; there is not much of what is lovely in woman-kind to be seen in the neighborhood of an army; so after all, it was scarcely to be wondered at that Robert Holden had remained heart-whole.

He was not heart-whole now—far from it, but that was something which had happened within the last three months. It was the simplest story in the world. He had seen the pretty new school-mistress, and had fallen in love with her, and had told her of his feeling

very honestly and plainly, and she had given him to understand that she loved him in return, and they were engaged. This was all very gratifying, but still there was one drop of bitterness in the honey cup.

Poor an opinion as the kind-hearted Robert had of himself, it was impossible for him to be quite unaware that he was the best "match" in the village; that for a girl in her position it was the greatest possible luck to get such an offer; and try as he would to believe the vows of her love which she positively asserted she would *prove* some day, Robert Holden looked at his maimed form and sighingly asked himself what there was in such a man as he, beside the money in his pocket, which could attract so brilliant and beautiful a woman as Minnie Davison.

Her history was rather a peculiar one, as well as being very sad. Her mother had died early, and her father, a hard-drinking money-getting, pushing, flying, inconsequent New York merchant, had been left as sole guardian to the pretty little daughter. She had been educated in France, and after her education had been completed had been hurried over the Continent by her impetuous father, and brought back to go through the perils of rich young ladyhood in the "first circles" of New York. She had had her own carriage, and her saddle-horse, and her groom; and one or two proposals of marriage, which were rejected because not considered advantageous enough for the stylish Miss Davison; and suddenly, in the midst of all this grandeur, there came a vague something, which seemed to be generally known as a "Smash," and away went Cinderella's pumpkin carriage, and the rat-horses, and her mice-footmen. All was over. Two years of grinding poverty followed, and at the end of that time a fairly besotted and prematurely old man died, leaving a beautiful young girl, without a friend or a dollar, alone in the world to struggle for herself. Through one of her former teachers, she heard of this place of school-mistress in the village of Marstown, and thither she went.

It was not possible—it was not in human nature, that she should like such a poor, quiet, humdrum little place, after the brilliant life she had led. Even after that terrible breaking up, when riches and all the luxuries they bring had vanished into thin air, she still lived in a noisy, bustling, brilliant, wicked metropolis. Her friend, Mrs. Pithole, might cut her because she was poor now; but she could not shut from her sight the animated scene which Broadway, in all its different aspects, presents. And now to live day after day, and year after year in a dull, noiseless, remote little Massachusetts village, surrounded by pupils consisting of a half-score ragged, saucy, thick-headed urchins, who loved her in the bottom of their perverse little hearts but who nevertheless saw no reason why they should not thrust their healthy little tongues

out at her whenever she set them the most necessary task. This life was death to her so Minnie told Robert Holden—until he came. Then all was different!

Did he believe her? God knows he wished to do so! But still—still—

He was ruminating upon it as he reached the door of the little store which served the triple office of dispensing stationery, newspaper literature and sugar-plums to the Marstowners, and in one corner of which there hung a sort of mysterious and suspended etagère divided off into little pigeon-holes. This piece of furniture was nothing more or less than the Marstown Post-Office itself. The Post-mistress was selling three cents worth of molasses candy to an uninteresting female child, as Robert entered and asked if there was a letter for him.

"Yes, indeed! I guess there is a letter for you, Mr. Holden," said the Post-mistress, dragging off a huge bit of coarse, brown paper, and laying the sticky molasses-mess inside—"a letter—there's two! There now, run home, sis; tell your mother if she wants any lemons again I've got some now; she needn't go to the grocery-store; and two letters from big towns too, I tell you, Mr. Holden; and say to your pap that I'm sorry he bought some of those yellow enn-velopes that don't stick—lots of people complained of them; I'll change 'em if he's got many. Yes, that's all; and Mr. Holden, on the big one there's three cents due.

Robert crushed the letters in his hand as he looked at the post marks and saw that neither was from the adjacent town where Minnie Davison had gone to spend a week with the family of one of her pupils. Acquitting his debt to the post-mistress, he sallied forth again, and, resuming the thread of his broken, unspoken thought, he walked slowly back to his own home. Minnie had promised to write to him; why had she not kept her word? He opened one of the letters; it was from a relative in Boston—a young man occupying a rather important position in a Bank. He complained of ill health, and informed Robert that he was going to run down to Marstown the next week, for a fortnight's relaxation. The other letter was from New York. The writer was a gay, rich young man, who had been very patriotic for a short time, and stayed in the army till the gold on his shoulders began to tarnish; then he resigned. Robert Holden wrote back to both to come down to Marstown as soon as possible, and stay as long as business or other engagements would allow.

Both invitations were accepted, and on the following Tuesday Marstown, the unsensational, was aroused from its usual apathy by the arrival of the two dashing young city gents. Curiously enough they met in the cars, and without previous introduction, compared notes, each discovered who the other was, and so Robert was saved the trouble of

bringing about an acquaintance which had already brought about itself. Of course they both had heard the story of the school-mistress. Robert Holden was too important a personage, and his probable marriage was too important a business, to remain long a secret. To George Wilson, the Bostonian Minnie Davison was a stranger; but it happened that Algernon Deene was one of the "offers" which had been rejected by Minnie's father, in their former days of grandeur. And thus it came that Algernon had some fine misgivings about the school-mistress, which he felt it his duty to communicate to Holden.

"Pray don't mention that subject, Deene," said Robert, impatiently, when, a day or two after their arrival, Algernon pronounced Minnie Davison's name.

"Did you understand me when I said that I knew her formerly—knew her well?"

"Yes," answered Holden; "what then?"

"And that I proposed to her once; and she rejected me?"

"Yes; and again I say, what then? You surely are not petty enough to bear spite."

"Spite! My dear fellow, if there is one atom of spite in the nature of Algy Deene, why you're the first person who ever discovered it, that's all I can say. But the answer to the 'what then!' of your question is this—are you sure you are not mistaken in the girl?"

"Deene!"

"Oh, come now, don't be tragic. I tell you I know her—know her well. She was a dreadful flirt when she—when the old man had money."

"So she has told me."

"I don't mean to say there was anything wrong in it, mind; or anything different to other girls, in the same situation; still, she was very fond of society."

"So she has told me," said Holden again.

"I don't know how she made out after the old fellow smashed, but I rather think that sobered her a little. Of course, she's a brilliant woman and a beautiful one, and one you could very well be proud of, but my great fear is (you must see that I have only your interest at heart in speaking in this manner, Bob) my great fear is that—that—by Jove, it's such a delicate manner I really don't know how to put it."

"What Deene means is this, Robert," said young Wilson, putting back his meerschaum, and closing the bright morocco case with a snap. "That this girl, being so fond of society, having suffered great poverty after having held such a different position previously, that it is highly probable she has made up her mind to marry any one on earth who wants her and has got money."

"Any one on earth!" Upon my word, Wilson, you place me in an ennobling category," said Holden with a hot, red face.

"Don't, for heaven's sake, don't get angry, Bob," chimed in Algy Deene. "I tell

you women are all alike. She is no worse, and very likely far better, than many of her sex. But it's just this, she is full of health, youth and beauty, while it so happens that you are—are—"

"Full of infirmities," said Robert, bitterly, shaking his empty sleeve, and touching with his stick the aching leg.

"It's not so much that," said Deene, "as it is your delicate health. Let me ask you how you would relish being obliged to 'do' three balls a night for a space of four months, during winter, to be followed by summer's equal parts,—Newport and Saratoga—well mixed."

Holden remembered how, even now, the slightest imprudence of late hours or wine was sufficient to make him ill for a couple of days.

"You take it for granted that we are going to be 'fashionables,'" said Holden.

"Come now," retorted Deene, "has she not exacted of you a promise to live in New York, her place of predilection?"

"I certainly told her she should live there if she liked; she exacted nothing from me."

"Suppose you were to tell her that you were determined never to leave Marstown—no, she'd be sure to think she could coax you out of that—suppose you were to tell her that you had lost every dollar, and were now as poor as a church mouse. Do you think she'd still be true to you?"

"I do," answered Robert, with conviction in his tone.

"Would you like to put her to the test?"

"No!" shouted Holden, springing up.

"Deene, this conversation has gone far enough. I love Minnie Davison, and have confidence in her love for me. Whatever your motives are, I can no longer permit a conversation which wrongs the woman of my choice. Let it stop here."

Minnie Davison's name was not mentioned for several days. Deene, whose motives were undeniably of the purest, was too fond of Holden to take umbrage at the impetuous reply which terminated this conversation; and like a thorough *bon enfant* as he was, Algy soon put the school-mistress, and love making, and dissensions of all kinds, quite out of his head.

Not so with Holden. Spite of his vaunted confidence in Minnie's love, Deene's opinion as to the unfitness of the match was in great measure shared by himself. He loved this woman with all the fervor of a first affection, and had there not existed that blighting doubt of the truth of her love for him his happiness would have been altogether without alloy. It seems so hard, so wronging, to doubt her; and yet doubt her he did.

It was Holden himself who reverted to the forbidden subject.

"Deene," said he, "I fear I was very rude the other day when we were speaking of Miss Davison, but you seemed to make it quite

an impossible condition of affairs that I should be loved for myself alone."

"Why, you dear old fellow," said Deene, "I think it just next to impossible that you should *not* be loved for yourself alone. I don't see who can help loving you—I can't, for one. I don't doubt Minnie Davison loves you—and loves you, as you say, for yourself alone. But this is the question, Bob. Do you think she has love *enough* for you, and strength of mind enough in herself, to live the quiet, recluse sort of life necessitated by the delicate state of your health? Don't you think that even with lots of love to begin with, your difference of tastes will lead by-and-by to your both pulling contrary ways, like a discontented double team in a fretting harness, until at last the wagon of matrimony will end by going to—to—you know what I mean—to—in fact—thunder!"

"The worst of it is," said George Wilson, who had hitherto kept silence, "that you can't believe any woman who walks the earth, when she swears she loves you." George Wilson had recently had some bitter experience with a woman who walked the earth in the city of Boston, and was therefore not very leniently disposed toward the sex.

"And you see this girl has such particularly strong reasons for making an advantageous match," added Deene.

"You torture me to death," moaned poor Holden throwing himself helplessly into a chair. "What am I to do?"

"Put her to the test, as I suggested the other day," said Deene.

"How?"

"Why look here, Bob. Supposing she were to receive a more eligible offer—a richer man than you are—a fashionable fellow, who'd promise her more society than she ever had in her gayest days—it would be the best of all tests, to see if her love for you would cause her to reject him."

"Who is there to make such an offer?"

Deene was silent.

"Do you mean yourself?"

"Why not myself, as well as another?"

"She refused you once, man."

"That was under very different circumstances, my dear fellow. She was then rich old Davison's beautiful daughter; not Minnie Davison, a poor schoolmistress at Marstown. I have inherited my mother's property since then, which gives me a good fifty thousand more than I had, and my business has increased wonderfully during and since the war."

"Well, if you propose to her, and—and—" Holden's voice trembled and sank into a low whisper—"and she accepts you—you will marry her?"

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing."

"Algernon Deene," shouted Holden, "you are a scoundrel!"

"Now Bob," said the imperturbable

Deene. "Don't get excited—don't be absurd, whatever happens. Why should I marry a woman who had just committed so dastardly an act as to play false to the best fellow that ever lived? You'll thank me some day for the ungrateful and disagreeable task I'm cutting out for myself here. For if she remain true to you, you'll be happier for this test—and if she prove false to you, why then also, you'll be far happier for the test. That's logic, isn't it? Will you give your consent?"

"Do what you like," said Holden, helplessly. "I suppose you mean it for my good."

"You must give me a little help," said Algy. "I can't manage it quite by myself. When do you expect her back from Boonsville, or Snoozewell, or Goosequill, or whatever the town's name is?"

"To-morrow."

"Ah! Just oblige me by sitting down at that desk, will you?"

Holden obeyed like a child.

"Now write her a few lines to the effect that you have lost everything in the world." Holden looked up into Deene's face with an expression of blank amazement.

"In the world," continued the undismayed Algy; "that your health is worse than ever, and that her life, if she joins it with yours, is likely to be one of constant privation and of the greatest seclusion. Tell her that, much as you love her, you feel it your duty to release her from her engagement unless she is fully prepared to encounter the dull and uninteresting life which is the only one possible for the woman who shall be your wife."

"This farce is as degrading to me as it is insulting to her," ejaculated Holden, writing as he was bid, nevertheless, carried along by the resistless current of Algy's reasoning.

"Now my dear fellow," continued the latter, seemingly unconscious of any interruption, "just oblige me by going away from Marstown. You and Wilson can go hunting, or fishing, or to the—excuse me, but anywhere just to leave me the field to myself, you know. Get off to-day, will you?"

Holden arose and left the room without a word. Wilson lingered.

"I'm afraid this is going to be a serious business," he said to Deene.

"Serious!" nonsense! I am going to write a story about it—call it Minnie's Ordeal or Miss Davison's Test—or something of that sort."

"I wish I could feel as easy, as you seem to do. It resolves itself into this, Deene—if the girl deserts him, it will break his heart, and if she hangs on, we shall have made a couple of donkeys of ourselves, that's all."

The next day, when the sun was beginning to get low Algy Deene in most irapproachable *tenue*, strolled down the main

street of Marstown, turned off into a shady lane, and rapping at the door of a poor-looking farm house, asked for Miss Davison. Minnie, hearing a man's voice, flew quickly down stairs, expecting to see Robert Holden. The bright flush of happy expectation faded from her face, and gave way to an expression of bewildered astonishment at view of the elegant stranger.

"Have four years made such a fearful wreck of him that Algernon Deene is no longer recognizable, Miss Davison?"

"Mr. Deene! How good of you to come to see me! I really did not know you at first. I was not expecting you, you know, and indeed you are somewhat changed."

The truth was, that Algy Deene was one of those men who grow handsomer and handsomer up to the age of forty. Minnie looked in amazement at the bright, rosy face which, without losing any of its youth in the last four years, had gained greatly in manly expression.

"Time is a sad dog, Miss Davison," said Deene, seating himself on a cane-seated chair, which was so hard it absolutely required all Algy's good breeding to suppress an ejaculatory "oh!" on coming in contact with it.

"Time is not a 'dog' at all, Mr. Deene," said Minnie, laughing. "He is a fine old man with a long white beard, and a scythe in his hand—at least so the picture-books say."

"You are still the same in everything, I see; robe, complexion,—all!"

"No, I am not," returned Minnie. "As to 'robe,' I think you remember that I used to be clad in purple and fine linen; now my linen is not fine, and my best purple calico fades dreadfully in the wash-tub. 'Complexion' may be better. I think it ought to be. The essence of six balls a week is a very poor cosmetic, Mr. Deene; it can't compare to country air and country hours as the true bloom of youth—of nature."

"Then you never sigh for the city, Miss Minnie?" asked Algy.

"Oh, yes I do—that is to say, I did. At one time, and indeed until very recently, it seemed quite impossible for me to ever get used to this most stupid of little villages. But we have talked quite enough about me; tell me about yourself. What on earth brings you to Marstown?"

"I came on a visit to my old friend, Bob Holden," answered Deene.

"Your old friend!" Is Mr. Holden a friend of yours? How glad I am to hear it," said Minnie.

"Yes, we are old friends, and I promised myself a delightful time with him, and should have had it, but for this dreadful stroke of ill-fortune which has knocked poor Bob completely off his legs."

"Ill-fortune," exclaimed Minnie Davison springing up. "Ill-fortune to Robert Holden! What is it? Oh pray tell me!"

"Why, haven't you heard yet? Oh to be sure not. Bob has taken such care to keep it close. Why the fact is, Miss Minnie, Bob has lost every dollar he had in the world!"

As Algy Deene told this cool falsehood, the expression of his *distingue* face was as innocent as that of any child. And yet his fashionable code of honor would have been a blow for the man who dared call him a liar! A somewhat singular inconsistency—quite in vogue in Algy's set.

"Lost his fortune!—Robert Holden poor!" echoed Minnie Davison.

"Poor! Poor's not the word for it. He's just next door to a beggar," continued the skillful Algy.

Minnie Davison burst into tears.

"I'm so—so sorry for him," she sobbed at length.

"And so am I," said Algy in a sympathizing tone; "very sorry, and if you won't take amiss the bluntness of an old friend, I will say to you that the only cause for congratulation I see in the whole affair is—well, I may as well out with it at once—that you are not married."

"He told you of our engagement, then," said Minnie.

"Yes, and I think he's very glad this happened before matrimony."

"Did he say so?" asked Minnie.

"N—no—not exactly that. But still I know he felt what a blow it would be to you. You have suffered such great poverty, Miss Davison. You don't mind my brusqueness, do you?"

"I have suffered dreadfully from poverty; I am suffering now," sighed Minnie. "But don't talk of me—what will Robert do?"

"Oh, he can get a clerkship, I suppose—or be somebody's secretary, no doubt."

"Robert Holden in a clerkship! Robert Holden somebody's secretary!"

"Why not? Better men—I mean as good men have had to do it, and scores of them too, before his time. But these delicate hands of yours were never meant for any household drudgery. Minnie, you were not born to be the wife of a poor man."

"Dear Mr. Deene, you are very good," said Minnie rising. "You will pardon my asking you to leave me now, will you not?"

"Oh certainly, Miss Minnie," said Algy, in reality very glad to get away; "will you permit me to come again?"

"Very gladly."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Bob was right," soliloquized Algy as he turned into the main street. "I am an unprincipled ruffian. How I lied to her! And how she swallowed everything! Never once asked how it happened, but took every word I said for gospel truth. Well, women are green ones, there's no mistake about that."

Algy was more struck with Minnie's beauty the second day than he had been the first;

for to his taste the pallor which this great blow had spread over her face was far more beautiful than the ruddy glow of health which had bloomed there the day before. Her long brown lashes were wet with tears, and, as Algy entered the wretched little parlor of the farm-house, he found both her attitude and speech indicating the greatest dejection.

"I have more news for you to-day," said Algy seating himself beside her.

"Yes?" said she, eagerly. "What is it?"

"A letter from Robert." He held it up, and she snatched it quickly. She read it aloud. It ran thus—

"MY DEAR MINNIE:—It is with the utmost grief I announce to you the complete loss of my fortune. I need not tell you that I feel it my duty to at once release you from your engagement of marriage made to me under such very different circumstances. It is the highest proof of love I can give you thus to relinquish what is far dearer to me than fortune or friends, or all the world beside. But I must give you this proof, and I feel doubly constrained to do so by the knowledge that my health was never worse than at present; this, coupled with my wretched pecuniary position, will entail upon the woman who consents to be my wife the greatest self-abnegation in all that relates to society and the varied charms of a city life; for, without doubt, I shall be tied to this miserable village for the remainder of my days.

"Minnie, I shall take it very kindly if you will write me a word on this subject. I know your answer in advance. Despair has told it me. But nothing can sting me so much coming from you—*nothing so much as silence.*

Your loving, R. H.

"Bravo, Bob!" was Algy's mental criticism on this piece of epistolary literature.

When he looked up he found Minnie leaning back, with closed eyes, in her chair, looking so ghastly white that Deene thought she must have fainted. He seized her hands and began chafing them violently.

"Don't be alarmed," she said; "it is nothing. It will soon be over."

"There is no more in that letter than I told you yesterday."

"No; but seeing it in his hand-writing, and poor Robert's way of putting it touched me a little, you know. Where can I send the answer?"

"You needn't trouble yourself about the answer for a week. Bob is off, and writes me he will be back then, when he hopes I shall be able to hand him your reply."

"I shall have it ready," said Miss Davison, shaking her head sadly.

"Minnie, how it grieves me to see you so distressed!"

Then there was a long pause and at length Deene said in a low voice,

"Do you know Minnie, you were very cruel to me once?"

"Have you not forgotten that yet?" asked Minnie.

"No indeed—not I—and never shall until you cause me to do so by some very great act of kindness. You know I loved you desperately, do you not?"

"I suppose you thought you did, or you never would have proposed to me."

"I loved you very, very devotedly, and your rejection of me nearly broke my heart; and Minnie—why should I conceal the truth? I love you now more, much more than ever."

"Mr. Deene!" exclaimed Miss Davison. "is this an insult?"

"Is it an insult to ask you to become my wife?"

She looked at him with astonishment depicted in every feature. He continued, without waiting for a reply:

"You are now off with this unfortunate affair of poor Bob. He releases you himself; and quite the correct thing in him, under the circumstances. And indeed, dear Minnie, it would not have been a very suitable match for you at the best; 'pon my word, it wouldn't. His ill health, his fondness for this stupid village where they don't even have the decency to manufacture anything even of so prosaic a character as shoes—like Lynn, you know, for instance—which are useful in the main, though unpleasant to the olfactories when new. On the other hand, myself, gay like yourself, fond of society, in splendid health, with plenty of money, and loving you very dearly. I repeat Minnie that I offer you my hand and—you know what I mean—my heart."

"I am very much astonished at this," said Minnie Davison.

"I don't want to hurry you, 'pon my word I don't. Take time before you answer. I'll give you a week, if you like. Only promise me you'll think about it."

"I promise," said Minnie.

It was very well for Miss Davison that there happened to be vacation at her school that week, otherwise Mr. Deene's attendance would have interfered sadly with her duties; for he was with her almost constantly, every day from noon till long past sunset. The week passed quickly to both, and now the day had arrived for Robert Holden's return.

"Have you written Bob's answer?" said Algy that evening, holding her hand, as they stood leave-taking at her gate.

"Yes, here it is," said Minnie, drawing the letter from her pocket, and placing it in his hand.

"You won't say positively whether you will have me or not, Minnie."

"You really have given me such a short time for reflection. What's a week after all? But I tell you what," she added, "you will know very well when Robert reads out that letter how I feel toward you, and what your chances are for the future."

"Dear, beautiful girl!" exclaimed Algy, pressing her hand violently. "Ah, Minnie! won't you give me a kiss before I go?"

"No," she said with pretty archness of tone; "I don't think that would be right just yet."

"There's no objection to my kissing your hand, is there?"

There was no objection to his kissing her hand, and so he kissed it.

Holden and Wilson had arrived an hour before Algy returned to the house. Holden did not trouble himself to make any complimentary inquiries in regard to health or weather, but blurted out instantly:

"Well, what's the news?"

"My dear fellow, you are a goner."

"For heaven's sake, drop your senseless jargon and tell me plainly—is the girl false to me?"

"Read for yourself, my boy," returned Algy. "And read out loud; mind, that was one of the conditions."

Robert seized the note roughly, tore open the envelope and read:

"MY DEAR ROBERT:

"When I was more accustomed to society, and knew exactly when men were saying what they did not mean, and when they meant what they did not say, I should perhaps have been better able to comprehend the exact bearing of your letter. But now that I have become to a certain degree unsophisticated and weak, it is difficult for me to understand whether you really wish to release me from my engagement of marriage to you or whether you desire a release from me. This makes your letter a most delicate one for me to answer; for I fear, reply as I will, I must appear to you either very indelicate or very heartless. Heartless I never have been—nor indelicate either, I trust; and now my only course is to be simply truthful, at whatever cost."

"Robert, I thought you knew from the first day I told you I loved you that I loved you to the exclusion of every human being at that time, and meant to continue to do so for all time. What imports it to me that you are poor! I love Robert Holden—not the farm that Peggs rents, or the grocery shop, with Mrs. Flynn in arrears. If your health is bad, so much the more reason for me to be near to render you those little services which you require. Don't think me immodest when I say that your dear image is in my mind from morning till night; and in my dreams, from night till morning again. I love you deeply, truly; better than any man I ever saw; better than any I ever shall see. I would rather be your wife if you were a common laborer in the fields than the wife of Algernon Deene (who has had the ineffable impertinence to propose to me again, and that too, not five minutes after I got your let-

ter) were he fifty times a millionaire. I will not release you Robert, until you write to me frankly that such is your desire. Defer our marriage, if you think it necessary, though I see no reason why I may not continue my school-teaching as well then as now. Do as you like, my darling; but do not—oh do not take from me your love, for I only live because I am your own, own

MINNIE."

Algernon Deene gave a long whistle.

"I knew my girl! I knew my girl! I told you so," said Robert Holden, triumphantly.

"Well, my dear fellow, at least give me the credit of having had the best intentions—"

"Certainly, Algy, your were all right. But, so far as 'good intentions' are concerned, did you ever hear of a certain place being paved with them?"

Robert and Minnie still live in the country at Minnie's express request. The house is very comfortable, and it is so quiet there (for baby is very good, and doesn't cry much)—so different, you know, to the noise and bustle of the city. Minnie never finds it dull; for, with her husband's society, and his books and her magazines, and her baby, and above all, Robert's love, she declares she knows the exact geographical position of Utopia, for she inhabits it. Perhaps she is very silly to be content to pass her life in a stupid Massachusetts village; but so long as she is happy, there is no use trying to wake the once brilliant New York girl from her dream, is there?

IV.

ABOUT NOTHING.

"My story to-night John," said I taking a little sip of water to wet my lips: "has for title:

"The Countess Carry's Canary Bird Cloak."

John burst out laughing.

"I knew it would come to that," he exclaimed.

"Come to what, sir?" I inquired, somewhat indignantly.

"Why, to talking about women's duds, cloaks and dresses and bonnets—and—hoop skirts!"

"If you tease me I shan't open my lips," I replied, pouting; for I was a novice at this story-telling business, and anything like ridicule completely upset me.

"Nonsense, child," said Aunt Julia. "Be quiet, John. Go on Nelly; you are getting

on very well indeed—at least that is my opinion."

Thus encouraged I began.

"I don't see, grandmamma, why you should always force us to coax you so before you ever tell us a story," said Annie pouting.

"But my dears," remonstrated grandmamma, "you keep me at it so constantly that I neglect other duties just to amuse you."

"I think, to amuse her grandchildren should be the first duty of every right-minded grandma," said Will, a saucy lad of sixteen. "And as for Countess Thingemy's Thingemy-bob cloak, you have promised to tell us about that more times than I can count."

"That's no sign that it has been often," said Annie, making rather a pointed allusion to Will's arithmetical deficiencies.

"If I promised," said grandmamma, picking up her knitting and resigning all hopes of a visit to the kitchen and laundry for that morning: "if I promised I will do so at once. I'm always as good as my word."

"You are better than your word, grandmamma. You are better than anything. You are the best grandma I ever knew. Perkins' grandma can't hold a candle to you; for though she gives P. lots of money, still she scolds him like—like—I don't know what—" concluded Will, in hopeless despair of finding a simile.

"Well, after I begin no interruptions, please," said grandmamma.

"Not an eruption," replied Will, who had been reading some of the funny papers.

"Well, dears, the first time I ever heard of the strange creature, who went by the name of the Countess Carry, I was quite a young girl—almost a child, it seems to me now; but I think, nevertheless, I must have been nearly twenty. Twenty appears very young when one gets to be almost seventy, as you will find if you live so long, my dears. I was living then with my mother in a very fashionable street—don't laugh, please—a square or two below Canal street—and as it was generally known that we were not only rich people, but people of good blood as well, we were treated with much deference by all our neighbors. In fact, our doings and our sayings absorbed the attention of all about us, when one fine day our brilliancy was destined to receive an eclipse by the advent of the Countess Carry."

No one knew exactly who she was, and she took good care no one should find out, and perhaps from the very mystery which surrounded her she attracted ten-fold the notice she otherwise would have done. She never appeared in public except when she went for a drive in her great, heavy, cornetted coach, the blinds of which were carefully drawn down during the entire time the occupant was inside.

I don't see what good it did her to drive

out; for surely never a breath of air penetrated those heavy, yellow silk carriage curtains; and as for view—why of course that must have been quite shut out, unless she permitted herself to enjoy it when she got out of town, on the Bowery.

The house which the Countess Carry had taken stood directly opposite to ours, and, from the day she entered it till the day she left, I never saw any of the shutters open. People said she kept her lamps and candles burning all day long; and that there was truth in this, I myself know. I will tell how, presently. She lived quite alone with a solitary attendant in the shape of a shrivelled-up old man, a foreigner, who drove her coach, and groomed her horses, and cooked her dinners, and did her chamber-work, the neighbors said, after the fashion of foreign men-servants. The Countess herself was a foreigner. Oh, yes, to be sure; we have no titles—you know that; and had not then, any more than now.

It appears that we were even in the dark as to her true name. Lawyer Watkins, who lived next door to us, said it was the Countess Quarrie, or the Countess Corrie, or something like that. But we always called her the Countess Carry, from the day she came amongst us till the day she left. You can easily imagine that the curiosity which such a woman awakened, coming in the midst of quiet people like ourselves, was intense.

Not that she was otherwise than quiet; she was as quiet as the grave itself. Except for the noise of the rumbling coach which rattled down the street twice a day—once to go and once to return—never a sign of life, never a show of being, issued from the Countess Carry.

But it was the very mystery which enveloped her—the deathlike silence as of the grave, which seemed to throw a pall over the existence of a human being full of life and health probably, that awakened the wonder of the neighbors, and gave rise to a thousand wild theories concerning the strange self-immuring of this foreign lady.

A story gained ground that she was insane, and that the old man-servant was her guardian or keeper. There was not any foundation for this, however, and it seemed scarcely probable that a person who had free ingress and egress to her carriage every day (for the man-servant always bowed her out and bowed her in at a respectful distance) should not call or cry out to passers-by if it were true that she was under restraint of any kind. Another was to the effect that she was a beautiful young creature who had been abominably treated by a wretch of a husband—another was that she was a beautiful young wretch who had treated a good husband abominably, and been deserted both by him and the man she deceived him for; another was something else, and another something else again—and at

last speculation about her ceased, for nothing could be found out. Whether the heavily-veiled, gracefully-draped figure which glided daily into the carriage was young or old, beautiful or hideous, rich or poor—or, for the matter of that, male or female—who could tell?

Some of the more determined neighbors had called upon her in the early days, but the old man-servant who took their names at the door said that Madame the Countess felt very grateful for their courtesy, but begged to be excused from receiving their visits or making any in return. And so, little by little, the mystery, still unsolved, of the Countess Carry died by degrees. That is to say, lively curiosity died because the novelty of the affair had worn off; but the embers wonderment, unquenched, were only smouldering, and might easily be revived with a breath.

You know, my children, how very fond I am of birds. Everything relating to these beautiful feathered tribes—the lively denizens of mid air—has the greatest interest for me. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if my special curiosity was awakened on reading the following advertisement in "HOLT'S NEW YORK JOURNAL" (and a very nice paper it was, my dears, though of course it is a thing of the past now).

The advertisement ran thus:

"WANTED. Any number of canary birds alive or dead; highest prices will be paid. Address C. C. at the Post Office of New York, America."

"There's a chance for you to make some money, Maria," said my mother to me, on reading it.

"Indeed!" replied I, tossing my head. "It's very probable I should think of selling my canary birds that William Allston brought me from—from—China."

I was an ignorant little puss, dears, as most girls of my age were then. But I knew that your grandfather, handsome Will Allston had brought me six beautiful canaries from some foreign country where he had been with his ship—THE REBEL COLONIST—and I knew that I prized them very highly, both for the sake of the birds, which were indeed rare at that time, as well as for the sake of the sailor lad to whom I was engaged. I think about a week had elapsed after the advertisement ceased appearing (for it appeared many times) when I was busily occupied cleaning my bird cages and giving the mocking-birds a new kind of seed which had just come out, and trying to keep the English larks alive by another treatment, and surveying my Robin Redbreast admiringly, and perking out my lips with little morsels of pared apple on them to my darlings of all, the canaries, when chancing to turn my eyes towards the house opposite I saw a female figure standing at the window, minutely

watching my actions with a telescope, or a large spyglass, or something like that! I knew it was the Countess Carry; but she had got to be rather an old story now. It was a nuisance, wondering who she was, and what she looked like, and never being able to find out. So I finished my birds toilette, pushed the aviary into the sun, and left the room. I called it my aviary, dears. I suppose it was very pretentious in me to do so, for it was only a great cage, about as long as that piano, divided off into compartments for the different birds. That was my aviary. I had scarcely got down into the breakfast parlor, where I generally sat in the morning and worked at useless and ugly embroidery, such as was in style then, when Susan, our little English maid, rushed in, and told me that "Please Miss, that strange lady—the Countess Carry—is in the drawing-room, and asking to see you!"

Here was astounding conduct! This extraordinary creature, who had refused the visits of the first people of the neighborhood—heads of families and their stuck-up wives—coming of her own accord to call on little Maria Wentworth! I really felt quite nervous, and gave my white neckerchief a new fold, and my hair an elaborate re-arrangement, before I mustered up courage enough to go in and meet her.

She rose as I entered, and, throwing back her heavy veil which, though she sat alone and in a darkened room, still covered her face, advanced toward me. She held out both hands and, drawing me on to the sofa beside her, kissed me first on one cheek, then on the other, before she spoke a word. Then I had time to scan her features. She was old; oh, yes, past fifty, I should think! Her hair was gray, but her eyes, though evidently weary with mental cares and physical suffering, were bright, soft, and beautiful; her features were regular to perfection; and though a little, inexperienced girl, with scarcely any knowledge even of the beauty of my own sex, I could not help seeing how marvelously lovely this woman must have been in her prime.

"You are astonished to see me," she said after a pause, speaking in such defective English that I could scarcely understand her.

Of course I answered that I was very glad to see her.

"You are a sweet *enfant*," she said, "what you call one little darling!" Then she kissed me again.

I did not know what to reply to this. By-and-by she spoke again.

"You are fond of birds?"

"Oh, very," I answered, aroused by the introduction of my favorite topic. "Are you?"

"Some birds I like," she replied. "Some I hate," hissing out the word in an extraordinarily vehement manner. "Indeed, I

hate them all except one kind, and those I love to distraction."

"What kind is that?" I asked wonderingly.

She looked about the room as if to assure herself that no one but myself was listening, and then leaning over towards me, she whispered mysteriously—

"Canaries."

"Those are my favorites too," I replied. "I am never so happy as when I am caring for them, and ministering to their little comforts, and keeping them from sickness—for birds do get sick, you know."

"Yes, but I don't care for that. I don't care if they die. I like them just as well dead as alive."

"What!" said I, horrified. "You like them as well dead as alive!"

"Better," answered she in a chuckling tone: "it saves so much trouble."

"I don't mind the trouble," I replied, indignantly. "I would clean their cages, and put fresh water into their baths a dozen times a day, if it were necessary."

"Yes," said the Countess Carry, "that's all very fine. But when they die naturally it saves one the trouble of killing them. I don't like to kill them. It pains one just as much to do it as if it were a human being one were killing. Still," she continued, with a sigh, "it has to be done."

I thought now of the report which had been circulated to the effect that she was insane, and I fully believed it. I was beginning to be terribly frightened of her. Suppose she were to imagine I was a canary bird, and that "killing" me "had to be done!"

The bell-pull was at an immense distance across the room, but the Countess Carry was leaning back on the sofa, with her eyes closed, the long lids sweeping the faded cheek, and the soft ripples of her silvery hair shading her wrinkled forehead. How lovely she looked thus! Spite of time and age, and suffering and infirmity, she was emphatically the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

She sprang from her recumbent position so suddenly that it gave me a shock which sent my poor little heart quite into my mouth. She started on a new "tack" this time.

"Do you like dress? What we call, you know, *la toilette*?"

"Yes," I answered hesitatingly, "I suppose every young girl does."

"Young girl! Faugh! what are young girls? What do they know about toilette? No, no, no, no! It is we—ah—*les grandes dames de la cour*, who look well with dress—we must have it. *Il nous la faut!*"

"Every woman, then," I ventured to remark, "every woman strives to be as beautifully dressed as she can."

"Yes," she said again chuckling; "but let them strive as they will, they will never have anything like mine. So original, so

very beautiful, so delicate to the complexion—ah how *belle* I shall be!"

"You are that now, Madame," I said, with truthful admiration of her beauty.

"You think so?" she exclaimed, evidently pleased. "But wait till you see me—will it ever be finished? or shall I die first? *Ah, mon Dieu!*"

I had not a word to say, for what with her rambling discourse and her dreadful French-English, I could scarcely understand what she was talking about.

"Let me see your birds," said she, with sudden animation.

I did not want to take her where they were. I had a sort of inward warning that I must beware of this woman; but I was afraid of her; positively afraid to disobey her, and I really believe if she had asked me for the carving-knife, so that she might cut my throat neatly, I should have rushed off with great alacrity and brought it to her.

"Where are they?" she asked.

"Up stairs."

"I hate stairs," she murmured. "I hate stairs and people, and creatures of all sorts, except—canaries."

"Perhaps you had better not go up," I suggested, hoping she would decline on account of the stairs.

"No, no," she answered, "No, I will go where they are. I wonder if there are any canary birds in heaven! I suppose so. Ah me!" with a deep sigh, "it must be a beautiful place if there are. I hope I shall go there. I think I shall. I have never done anything very wicked. It is not very wicked to kill poor little canaries—still—" (sighing again,) "It is painful."

I determined that this flighty Countess Carry should not get very near my canaries. Whether or not it was wicked to kill them was an open question. My own opinion was that it was frightfully wicked to do so. However, she should have no opportunity, so far as mine were concerned, to commit this wicked or innocent act.

I opened the door of the bird-room, as we called it, and saw that my little canaries were all there, all right in the cage. I preceded the Countess, and intended to keep in front of her the whole time she was in the room, but, bless you! before ever she crossed the threshold, and as soon as she caught sight of the cage, she uttered a piercing shriek and fell down on the floor in a dead swoon!

I tried to raise her, but could not. I called for help, but no one came. That stupid Susan had gone out, and so had all the family, leaving me alone in the house. I chafed the Countess' cold hands trying to revive her, but there she lay, prone like a dead thing, in the passage-way before the door of the bird-room. Suddenly a frightful thought crossed my brain. *Was she dead?* Quick as lightning I sprang over her prostrate form, and in a minute after I was pounding away at the

house opposite, the door of which was opened by the foreign man-servant.

"Come," said I, seizing his withered arm. "Come across the street to our house. Your mistress—I'm afraid she's dead!"

"*Grand Dieu!*" he muttered, raising his bony hands and shaking them above his head, "is it possible!"

By this time a crowd had assembled, and, as I returned with the old man, our house began to fill with gaping creatures, wandering about the rooms after they had fully surveyed the prostrate form of the wretched woman, who lay exactly where I had left her, having apparently never stirred. The old servant lifted her tenderly in his arms, carried her across the street, banging the door in the faces of a dozen inquiring people; and little by little the excitement faded out and quiet was restored. Mamma returned to the house and put me to bed with a nervous headache, and there I stayed till the next morning. The first thing I thought of on waking was my birds; and so, loading myself with seed and apples and fish-bone, which we kept in the pantry, I threw on my wrapper and went to the bird-room.

Oh my darling children! It makes me cry now to think of it. *All my beautiful canaries were gone!*

I knew that woman had taken them. I could have sworn to it. Every bit of passion in my nature was aroused, and I felt I could almost kill this hideous female fiend who had first stolen my beautiful pets and then, no doubt, in her mad folly, killed them. I cry now, but I couldn't cry then, for all the devil in me was awakened. I had lost all fear of her, and her insanity. I walked across the street, and pounded lustily at the ugly green-panelled door. I think I must have been there ten minutes before any notice was taken of the noise I was making—enough to rouse the sleepers in Trinity churchyard. At length the old man peered from a window above.

"What you want?" he asked.

"Come down here at once," I screamed, "and listen to what I've got to say."

In a moment he opened the door—only partly however, and determined to oppose any effort which might be made to force an entrance. I saw that.

"Let me in," I exclaimed. "I want to see your mistress!"

"*Ah je regrette*; but impossible. Madame la Comtesse—poor lady, so very ill—very near to die; but she get better."

"Where are my canaries? You dreadful old man, you know well enough if you would but tell."

"*Ah Mademoiselle*, and I who can not comprehend but so very bad the English—and some other day when Madame will be better—*permettez* that I present my respects to *Mademoiselle*." So saying he closed the door in my face.

The same scene or one very similar occurred every day for a month.

There was no use remonstrating with me on the folly of my determination. I had resolved to see the Countess Carry once more. At the end of a month I succeeded in my desire. I was standing in the hall-way of her rattle-trap of a house, when she suddenly burst out from a room at its remote end. Though the door of this room had only been open for a moment, I saw that, broad sun-light as it was outside, the windows and curtains were closed, and the room lit up with candles. There was a musty odor issued from it, and it appeared to me that on the air was borne a curious sort of floating down not unlike that which covers the breast of swans. The Countess brushed her dress nervously as she approached me; perhaps she was afraid some of this was clinging to her gown.

"I want my birds," I said, roughly—"my canaries. Where are they?"

"Poor child," she said in her bad English, "is you often—what you call—crazy?"

"Madam," said I, "this is no laughing matter. I am not crazy. The day you were at our house I lost my six beautiful canaries. You cannot wonder, after your singular conversation that day, coupled with the disappearance of my birds, that I should suspect you; and I ask you again, where are my canaries?"

"My child, was I or was I not to faint in your house?"

"You did," I answered.

And you suppose I amuse myself by to fall down, to cut my head, and then to get up, take your birds, and fall to faint again?"

"I don't know what you did, or what you would do," I replied savagely.

"But it is necessary to remember that I have plenty of money. Money buys everything—you know that. I can buy canaries."

"You can't," I retorted, "you can't. You put that advertisement in, and no one had any birds to sell you. You know that as well as I do. Canaries are most difficult to get. They come from a far distant country—China—or—or Amsterdam—or—some place."

"What shall I say?" she replied shrugging her shoulders. "If you want money from me I will give money. I know nothing about your birds. How should I? What money will you have?"

"None," I replied. "I want nothing but my birds, and as I cannot get them I will go away from you."

"*C'est cela*," she answered, "that is best. And ah—one word. Do not come here not one time more. I hate you very much. I might kill you. I have no knives. Constant takes all the knives away from me. But I have scissors. *Ah, mon Dieu!* One must have scissors for my work. Don't you think I could kill you with my scissors?"

"I dare say you could," I answered, "I

dare say you have already killed many persons, you wicked woman!"

"No, no," she replied coolly; "you make a mistake. I have never killed any person. Birds—that is different. I do not like to do that. But *que voulez-vous?* It has to be done."

Disgusted with her jargon and the sentiment of it, I left the house.

I never saw the countess again but on one occasion. It was at the Governor's ball. Of course we were invited, and as no one seemed to believe me when I asserted that she was a raving mad-woman, she was invited also. I shall never forget how beautiful she looked. Her hair was powdered until it was a dead white, and that was greatly the fashion then. No doubt she was rouged slightly, and perhaps her eyelids blackened with *noir indien*; but if this was the case it was most skillfully done—executed probably by a master-hand. Her costume was composed of the richest materials, her diamonds were positively dazzling to the eye, while over her shoulders was flung a delicate lemon-colored cloak of some curious and, to me, unknown tissue. At first I thought it was satin—then it struck me it was fur; and when I drew nearer, what on earth do you suppose I found it was made of?

Of the feathers of hundreds and hundreds of poor little canary birds!

Oh, my dears, I positively raved! This then was the grave of my six little darlings. All gone—sacrificed—killed to satisfy the vanity of this horrible, *passée*, wicked old court flirt!

She was dancing in a beautiful, stately manner with the Governor, and I walked straight up to him and touched him on the shoulder. Mamma tried to hold me back, but I would go.

"Don't," said I—"don't, your Excellency—don't dance any more with that wicked old woman—that—that *murderess!*"

Such a scene of confusion as ensued! Papa and mamma hurried me away. They were afraid something dreadful would happen to me for my boldness; and, going home in the carriage, they settled to send me to the country the next morning, out of this woman's reach. But, bless your hearts! before ever the sun rose the next morning, every vestige of the Countess Carry, her old man-servant, and her canary-bird cloak, had disappeared from the rattle-trap house with the green-panelled door.

She had taken ship for France.

And now comes the strangest part of all. Before the year was out I got a letter from her. It ran thus:

"*Petite Misérable*:

"I am very good *enfant*, or I should have killed you for what you did that night. But I have never killed any human being yet, and hope I shall never be obliged to do so. I think I can get on without killing any one.

I have killed quantities of canaries. Yes, dear, I killed yours. I squeezed their throats so they should make no noise that day when you thought I was fainting on the stairs. Was it not cleverly played, that farce? You see, for fifteen years I have been working at a beautiful garment. *Recherché* in the extreme—a cloak composed entirely of canaries' feathers. It would have been a pity to disappoint me, would it not. I had set my heart on it for so long? Such an original idea, too! My relatives in France say I am insane, and for that reason they sent me over to America for change of air. Bah! such trash. They sent that good *canaille* Constant with me. He is idiot, but obedient. Sometimes I think of killing him because he has yellow skin, the same color as my cloak. Such impertinent rivalry of my favorite color, and by a servant!

"Did I not look beautiful that night? The Governor was just telling me how ravishingly *belle* I was when you stepped up to him. You poor little cat! Which do you think looked most like a mad-woman at that moment, you or I?"

"*Après*, was not the cloak becoming! That delicate shade, oh, like citrons. Your birds just finished the collar. I don't know how I should have completed it without them. Only think—fifteen years' work. I think you ought to be delighted.

"Take the bank-note for two hundred francs, which you will find in this letter, and buy yourself a new gown. That will be more valuable to you than any birds.

"Do as I bid you at once; and remember all your life, you stupid little republican, that you have had the honor of receiving a letter from a titled lady of France.

"LA COMTESSE CLARISSE DE LA QUARRI."

I was so outraged by this impudent letter that I was just on the point of throwing the wicked old thing's bank-note into the fire, but mamma stopped me by saying that I had better keep it, as it would buy many little things that I wanted for my wedding outfit.

William Allston and I were married in the spring, and what do you think your grandfather gave me for my wedding present?

A dozen—a whole dozen—beautiful young canary birds!

V.

ABOUT NOTHING—SHORTER.

"What shall I write you down—ahem!—to-night, Nell?" asked John.—"MY CLIENT FROM BROOKLYN?"

"Your client? Well, upon my word—the deas of woman. Eh! your client! So you're a lawyer, are you? What'll you be next, I wonder?"

"Very angry at you, sir, if you don't stop teasing me."

"Do be quiet, my dear boy," said Aunt Julia. "Silence in the court-house!"

"Yes," continued John Morris, "the cat's a going to speak.

My Client from Brooklyn.

A lawyer's office is not a very attractive place. Its only merit, if a necessity can be called a merit, consists in its exquisite neatness. Those innumerable bundles of papers, systematically arranged, correctly labelled, and jauntily tied with the much abused red tape, those mysterious tin boxes, whose contents are happily unknown to the uninitiated, and spring-lock drawers, which open but to the master's key. That key I possessed. Of those drawers—of that room, I was the master. At No 21 Wilsop street I was monarch of all I surveyed, and it is but fair to say that my kingdom none did dispute. I hope it will not be understood by this that I was a poor starveling, with an empty purse and a full green-bag. Nothing of the sort. I was overwhelmed with business, and if it had not been for the merest accident I might have sent away, and never seen my client from Brooklyn.

She had called several times and sent in her name—Miss Wharton; but I was busy each day, and sent out polite regrets, and the desire that she might call again. She did so, and again I was occupied and could not see her. But, on a certain Monday morning, I sat alone in my office, conning over the papers in *re Daily Comet*. The *Daily Comet* was a newspaper which had been set afloat by a capitalist who was assured by the would-be editor that there was never such an investment offered as that which was now presented to his admiring gaze. And, indeed, this was quite true. Never was there such an investment for sinking funds. The paper, deeply in debt before my client took hold of it, had an odd peculiarity of getting more so the more money furnished it; so, after bearing this literary atlas for a period of ten months, my client threw up the concern in disgust, and vowed he would have nothing more to do with it. This, however, was easier said than done. It flavored of a good joke—his saying he would have "nothing more to do with it;" for the *Daily Comet* was not a load to be shaken off lightly, as he found, to his cost.

The Old Man of the Sea never clung to the sailor's back with more tenacity than did the floating debts of the *Daily Comet* to my unhappy client. In vain he writhed and groaned and tried to repudiate; creditors seemed, like the victims of jealousy, to make the meat they fed on, and no mushroom growth of a night ever sprung up with more rapidity than did this *Daily Comet* fungi, poisoning the happiness of my unfortunate friend.

On this particular Monday morning then, be it known, I had an engagement in my office, with the gentleman in question, and I had left word that on no condition was I to be disturbed by other parties. The hour fixed for our meeting was ten o'clock, and I had specially enjoined my client to be punctual; but spite of my request, ten, half past ten, a quarter to eleven arrived, and still no *Comet* man. I rose impatiently, and called one of my clerks.

"Rodgers," said I, "I can't stop any longer for Mr. Indette. Tell him to call again, at five."

The clerk answered "yes'er," and handed me, my umbrella from the corner, (for it was raining cats and dogs, as the saying is). I put on my hat and stepped out into the passage.

It was rather dark there, and my eye-sight is none of the best, but I immediately saw a slender figure shrink back in a corner as I emerged noisily from my rooms. I hate mystery. I hate it of all things; and given a rainy morning in the dull, suicidal month of November, a dark passage-way in an office-building, a shrinking female dressed in black, looming out of a cobwebby back-ground, and what can you make of it but a mystery of the most mysterious sort? I was determined to probe it. Yes, probe it I would; and that quickly.

"What do you want, my good woman?" I shouted, as if she were very deaf. I had somehow conceived the idea that she was old; so I called her "my good woman." Women are generally more "good" at an advanced period of life than when they are young and pretty, and have temptations cast in their way.

The "good woman" came forward timidly, and then I saw that she was a girl of about twenty, with a fresh, blooming young face, but with a scared expression of eyes, as though she were laboring under a great fear of some terrible catastrophe about to happen.

"I want to see Mr. Alexander Bywood," said the "good woman" looking about as if such a desire were highly reprehensible, and would presently meet with the punishment it deserved.

"That's me," said I, with a patronizing air. I should have said "that's I," shouldn't I? I know it. We lawyer-folk ought to be mighty particular about our grammar. But we're not. We fall into error as well as illegal people, once in a while.

"Indeed, sir," said she in a tremulous voice and looking more frightened than ever; "could I—if it will not take too much of your time—consult you about a little affair—very trifling to be sure—but I have come several times to see you and never succeeded—and it's something of a trip too—I live in Brooklyn."

I confess I was cross that morning. The *Comet* man had made me lose a good hour of

my time, and I had a vague idea that this was a client who was never going to pay me anything. I had no positive engagement out, and the *Comet*, in its eccentric flight, might dash in upon me at any minute; so I resolved to go back. I put my latch-key into the key-hole of my private office, and let my client from Brooklyn enter. Before she seated herself she deftly slipped some notes into my hand, and I saw at a glance that they counted up into a larger fee than I generally received for a first visit; so it was evident she was not going to be an unremunerative client. The knowledge of this mollified me a little, though I took up the notes with a disdainful air, and placed them far away from me at the remote end of my desk as if they and their like were thoroughly beneath the notice of a great person like myself. This was far from being the case; for I was buying myself an expensive house in an up-town street, paying for it by tri-yearly instalments, and all fees, large or small were of the greatest use.

Having pretty well satisfied her, I fancied, that I was a very important individual, with whom there must be no fooling. I rocked myself back in my chair, clasped my hands at the back of my head, and staring determinedly at the ceiling, told her sharply to "go on."

She went on. She went on very nicely. Poor young thing! she went on with a most trying and delicate story, in such a clear, concise, modest little way, that before she had half finished her recital, my dried-up parchment-like bit of a heart was all aglow with interest in my client from Brooklyn. It was an awful task, her getting out that story. But she did it, never omitting a detail that might enlighten me; the same as a conscientious witness in an infanticide case "outs with" everything, from the minutest particular in regard to the birth of the child down to every known detail of its murder.

Miss Wharton's story was to the following effect—

Her mother had died when she was too young to remember much about her, and her father, who had been in business in New York, had retired to Brooklyn, on a comfortable income, within the past three years. He was now little better than a hopeless invalid, however; and deeply grounded in the hearts of both father and child was a reverential affection for the deceased mother. This quiet condition of affairs had gone on uninterruptedly until about two months back, when the peace of the family, or at least of Miss Wharton, had been seriously disturbed. Such disturbance was caused by the appearance of a strange looking man, who, after having dogged the girl's footsteps for many days, at length succeeded in so working on her fears as to induce her to give him a few minutes hearing, and in that hearing she learned his story.

His story was to the effect that his name, coupled with his rank, was Captain Louis Bel-

kamp; that shortly after her mother's marriage, himself and she had met, and according to the Captain's story, fallen desperately in love with each other. After the captain left the port of New York in his merchantman, bound for the West Indies, he had received several letters of the most criminating character from the infatuated Mrs. Wharton, and the Captain now put it plainly to my client whether she did or did not think it was quite worth her while to hand him over one-half the monthly allowance her father was in the habit of giving her for the laudable purpose of inducing him to keep his tongue between his teeth. It appears Miss Wharton showing extraordinary firmness for her, had held out against this impudent demand until he told her plainly something which he kindly said he wished to spare her, and which was that she, Caroline Wharton, was his, Captain Belkamp's daughter! Of course this was a terrible blow to my client. What one might call a staggerer. But she rallied enough to ask him what proof he had of such a thing.

"Oh, proof! He had proof enough. He had destroyed all his darling Mrs. Wharton's letters—all except one, which told the whole story. Did Miss Wharton wish to read it?" "No, no," she replied shuddering. "Very well," answered the Captain, "very well, only when you do, my dear, there's a verbatim copy of it," and he slipped the paper in her hand. "The original I will part with for—let me see—I would give it to you, mind, for five hundred dollars. In the meantime, dear, only half your monthly income will prevent my going to—oh—old Wharton—and destroying his belief in the—of course—you know—defunct angel. And as for you, my dear, it seems to me that the ties of consan—, what-d'ye-call-'em—guinity, ought to induce you to give that much of your paltry money to your poor father!"

She shrank away from him thoroughly horrified, and for two months had paid him over half her income. This foolish accession to his demands had of course emboldened him to further importunity, and he was now loudly calling for two hundred dollars in cash, in default of which he was to go within a week to Mr. Wharton, lay the criminating letter before the sick man, and then take upon himself the pleasant task of going about to her friends in Brooklyn and informing them of the stain on Miss Wharton's birth. In this moment of sore distress (for she really could not get so much money and pay it out without fully accounting for it) she thought she had better consult a lawyer, and came to me.

I was infuriated at the conduct of this man Belkamp. In all my professional experience I had never heard of anything more base and vile, than pursuing this innocent young girl in so savage and indecent a manner. Those timid eyes of hers would have penetrated the heart of a stone—and this man

who pretended to be her father—I did not believe a word of it!

Looking at it either way, the wretch must be the greatest dastard that ever walked unhung, supposing it were true! What a horrible act this, to be making capital out of the letter of a woman, who had doubtless loved him with foolish and blind devotion! and if it were false, was it not unheard-of and hideous cruelty to be playing this sharp game on a guileless and inoffensive girl? Somehow, I had fully persuaded myself that it was a lie from beginning to end.

"What a brute!" I exclaimed, walking excitedly to the window. "What a complete brute! Why, law is far too good for such scoundrels as he! My advice is to hire some one to kick him."

"Oh, no sir!" she answered hurriedly. "Oh, no, pray don't think of anything of that kind; you don't know, indeed you don't—how terribly vindictive he is! Is that really your legal advice?"

Poor child! I suppose she thought she had paid her fee to a curious sort of lawyer, whose first advice to her was to drop law and adopt kicking.

"Where is that letter?" I asked, without replying to her question.

"What letter?"

"Why—the letter that this man has—or at least the copy. You said you had it."

Ah yes, she had it. She had almost forgotten it. She had never read it. She had always shrunk from acquainting herself with more of the facts than she was already possessed of. I read the letter, expecting to find it of a very criminating character, but I was disappointed. It was criminating in a measure, certainly. It was a silly woman's silly love-letter to her "Darling Louis." There was but a single line of reference to my client.

"Little Carrie Wharton is well, and often asks after the gentleman who gave her the doll."

Miss Wharton blushed deeply at these underscorings; her sensitive nature leading her at once to infer that this was a subtle hint of a common knowledge between the party writing and the party receiving. Of course, I observed to her that we had no certainty that such underscorings existed in the original document—this copy being in the precious hand-writing of Captain Louis Belkamp; and even if they did, might they not have been placed there by the hand of that honorable party himself?

No, she was disposed to see it at its worst. Her mother—and she pronounced the word mother nervously—her mother had in sarcasm called her Carrie Wharton, because she had no right to that name, and—

"And she called him, in sarcasm, the gentleman, because he has no right to that name also, I suppose."

"What is to be done?" she asked in despair.

"Done! why, it's as clear as daylight. I'll have the fellow arrested for illegal attempts to extort money from you—that's what I'll do."

A perfect volley of no, no, no's, at this. She would not hear of it for a moment. Such a course, no matter how effectually it put an end to Captain Belkamp's extortion in the future, would give the affair a notoriety which she was determined at any cost to avoid. "Only think how much suffering it would cause poor, poor Papa;" and she blushed as she used the word. "Even supposing the letter a forgery, and the whole affair a fabrication," said my client, "it cannot fail to be almost as harmful to us as if it were strictly true. Every one has enemies, you know Mr. Bywood, especially men who have been or are in business, as well as marriageable girls," and here the timid eyes were lowered. "Papa and I have enemies, I presume—not that I know of any—but there are some doubtless, and they would fasten upon this and hurt us just as much with it, as if the stories were all true, as I said before. Therefore, my great desire is to try and conciliate this matter, Mr. Bywood; conciliate it. I assure you papa would die if he were to hear a word of such a dreadful affair."

I thought if any old man were silly enough to die just because a scoundrel was extorting money from his daughter, he ought to be permitted to do it as expeditiously as possible. But I did not say this to Miss Wharton.

"Would you therefore, Mr. Bywood, so far oblige me—I should take it as a personal favor" (and I knew she was willing to pay for favors) "as to consent to see this person—this Captain Belkamp, and find out if some arrangement can't be made by which I can obtain possession of that letter."

"He can fudge up another in twenty-four hours' time," said I.

"No, not another like that," she said. And then she confessed to me that, though she was not very familiar with her mother's handwriting—Mrs. Wharton having died so many years ago—and though she had only obtained a hurried glimpse at the letter in this man's possession, she nevertheless felt convinced that the document was an authentic one, and was in fact what it was claimed to be by Captain Belkamp.

"I don't see what good there was in your coming to a lawyer, Miss Wharton, if you're going about it in such an unlawful-like way. Why did not you address yourself to any—any male of your acquaintance?"

"I have very few male friends, Mr. Bywood, and none of those few would I take into my confidence. Oh, can you not understand that I wish to avoid the scandal of it; that I want to keep the knowledge of the existence of such an affair away—altogether away from talkative people? Therefore, as

I said before, if conciliatory measures can be used—"

"Conciliatory devils," I ejaculated, now myself becoming very unlawful-like. "The scoundrel ought to have his neck wrung."

"Then I am to understand you will not see him?" said Miss Wharton, rising.

"Wait a minute. When are you going to see him again?"

"I have promised to meet him in—Park, Brooklyn, to-morrow at two o'clock."

"Very well. I shall be there."

She seemed very grateful, and as she was leaving I offered my hand. Not expecting this, the movement had fallen abortive before she extended hers. I, seeing this, proffered mine once more, only to miss hers again; and it was not until Rodgers opened the door and announced "Mr. Indette" that I laughingly seized her hand, gave it a hearty shake, and thus took leave for that day of my new client.

On the morrow I crossed the ferry according to her directions, and made the best of my way to the Park she had mentioned. I was not familiar with the streets of Brooklyn, and was therefore obliged to enquire a half a dozen times before I found the place of rendezvous. Once in the Park it was all plain sailing: for seated on a stone bench, not a dozen yards from the gate, was the beautiful girl dressed as before in black, side by side with a shabby individual, whom I at once recognized as her persecutor.

Thinking me merely a passer-by, I suppose, Captain Belkamp was doubtless somewhat astonished when I stepped up to Miss Wharton and said—

"My dear young lady, would you oblige me by leaving me alone with this gentleman?"

She obeyed me without a word; but with a look of gratitude on her sweet features which I shall never forget.

I have seen a good number of scoundrels in my time, but of all the thorough ruffians I ever laid eyes upon I award the palm to Captain Louis Belkamp. He was a slouching, skulking brute, with bleary drunken eyes, ill-kempt hair, and a straggling, irregular beard. A thorough hang-dog countenance; a face of itself that ought to have sent him to the gallows.

"Well," he said impudently, after I had surveyed him at my ease and doubtless expressed my disgust of him by facial contortion, "well, what do you want with me?"

"I can answer that question in four words," I replied bluntly! "I want that letter."

"Oh, indeed," exclaimed Captain Belkamp. "Oh, in—deed! she's been blowing, has she? Well, she'll wish she hadn't. That's all I can say. She'll wish she hadn't. Who are you, that you dare speak to me in this tone, sir. Are you a lawyer or a policeman?"

"No matter," I replied "I am a man. I am not a timid girl, like Miss Wharton. I want that letter."

"And how, pray do you propose to get it? By money?" he asked eagerly.

"No, I do not, you rascal," I exclaimed; "You've had the last dollar you shall get from Miss Wharton. Yes, and the last cent."

"Oh, then you mean to get it by coaxing," said Captain Belknap with fine irony.

"No, not by coaxing," I replied quietly.

"You don't mean to say you'd try to get it by force," he stuttered.

"Well," I replied very coolly, "that's as may be. It seems to me as if I were a poor feeble old man like you (given to drink too, which makes the strongest man powerless), and had possession of a document which I knew a muscular fellow like myself—an I twirled my stick rapidly—"a muscular fellow like myself wanted, I think I'd be likely to keep out of his way o' dark nights."

"Why, you wouldn't knock me down, would you? You wouldn't dare do it. I'd have the law of you."

"Ah, ha! But how about *our* having the law of *you*? eh? What do you say to that? Threats, you know—threats—extorting money—and so forth. You old scoundrel, that's what I ought to do now; and I would if I had my own way in the matter. I'm acting clean against principle and precedent and prudence in this affair. And you know it. But I'm obliged to do it because I promised. Only I say—keep out of my way o' dark nights."

"Now look here," said the Captain, trying the "conciliatory" himself, "what's the use of being so ill-tempered about it? Why not give me something a little handsome—and take the letter—and be done with it, for good and all."

"Not a cent!" I shouted emphatically. "Not one. Understand that at once—and—" repeating what I saw had been an effective phrase—"keep out of my way o' dark nights."

"Now, there's no use of you're being so violent. Mr.—whatever your name may be. No use under the sun. What earthly good would it do for you to attack me of a dark night, as you say? What good would it do you?"

"I might obtain possession of the letter," I said.

"No you wouldn't. You wouldn't do any such thing. You wouldn't, I tell you. I don't carry it about me."

He saw immediately that he was giving me a clue to its whereabouts by this avowal, and it was evident he at once repented having made it.

"I ought not to have told you that," continued the ruffianly old scoundrel. "But I had to do it. I wanted to prevent your be-

having ugly toward me, which wouldn't do the slightest good. I repeat—not the slightest."

"I'm not so easily humbugged as you think, Mr.—Captain Belknap. And I've dealt with too many wily old rascals like yourself not to know how they will lie, and swear to their lies, to throw an adversary off the scent. I dare say you've got the letter now in that breast-pocket," I said, moving up toward him a little menacingly.

"I wish I may die if I have," he whined, in a maudlin tone, at the same time emptying, not only that but every pocket about his clothing. "I haven't it at all. Look yourself. Examine every scrap o' paper I've got about me. Why, you must know it's hardly likely that a poor old fellow like me—who is as weak as a reed, and gets drunk as you say—it's hardly likely I'd carry around such a precious document as that. Worth money to me, that letter is, and came, of course, from my dear—well, she's dead now, poor thing. Why, I was robbed the other night; got a little how-come-you so, and the next morning found that I was robbed. Stolen every dollar from me, sir; money too, that Miss—that is, my dear daughter, you know—had given me! Too bad, wasn't it? No, no. Catch Loo Belknap being such a fool as to carry that letter around."

"Well, if you haven't got it about your person, you've got it secreted somewhere," I said.

"Certainly I have. Certainly I have. But where? That's the question, *WHERE?*"

I rose to go, for I was getting so out of temper that in a couple of minutes longer I felt I should pounce on this blackguard and give him a sound drubbing, which would have done "no good," as he said—and might have done a great deal of harm, in the way of leading to an exposure, which my client so seriously dreaded. As I was walking off, Captain Belknap spoke again:

"If you want to know where the letter is," (and involuntarily I stopped), "I'll tell you. It's in Bank. In the bank of a dear friend of mine. He'd go through brandy and water—I mean fire and water,—for me. So would his Safe. It's in his Safe. Great strong safe. Five locks. Secret keys. Letter sealed up—my seal—tied with red tape. Ha! Ha! Where is that bank? Don't you wish you knew? Where is that Safe? Don't you wish you knew? Where is that *LETTER*? Don't you wish you knew—wish you knew—wish you knew?"

He rubbed his villainous old hands together, chuckled in a sort of low laugh, and supporting himself on a heavy notched old cane, shambled away.

I returned to town, and took no steps in the matter for more than a week. I wanted the Captain to believe that I had dropped the affair, seeing the utter hopelessness of

ever obtaining possession of the letter for which (for the sake of her mother's reputation and for her own position in society) I knew and he knew, Miss Wharton would give every dollar she could muster.

At the end of ten days I again went to Brooklyn.

It was a very easy matter to find out where Captain Belknap lodged. The landlady was a talkative old woman, whom I frightened into secrecy by my legal bearing, and the assurance that though she had unwittingly been so unfortunate as to harbor an escaped state's prison convict in the person of Captain Belknap, I would graciously protect her from all harm if she would carefully aid me in my plans, and abstain from giving her lodger the slightest hint that the "dogs of law" were on his track. This she promised; so frightened by my story that she was nearer dead than alive. But I told her that her sanitary and social condition would be better after I had ousted her lodger—but this I said must be done cautiously.

Finding the man was out (but whether he would return late or early the landlady could not tell,) I ordered Mrs. Daff to give me the pass key of her rooms, so that I might take a minute survey of Captain Belknap's premises.

She gave it, without the least hesitation.

Captain Belknap's room was quite at the top of the house, with a sloping ceiling, and two low windows looking down on the shabby street. His bed, a fit lair for such a dirty wretch as himself, had not been made since its occupancy of the preceding night. At the foot of the bed stood an oaken cupboard or wardrobe, and this piece of furniture I carefully examined, for, spite of Captain Belknap's story about the letter being deposited in the "bank" of a "dear friend" who would go through "brandy and water" for him, I somehow felt convinced that the "bank," and the "safe" and the "letter" itself were all within the four dirty white-washed walls which now encompassed me. If it were true that he had deposited it, then of course the figurative search for the needle in the haystack were no more useless than mine. But I felt that the story was a fabrication from beginning to end. Head men at the banks do not usually select their friends from the low grade of society in which move such persons as Belknap and his ilk. I felt that the letter was concealed in this room.

I was proceeding in my search, peering into every nook, examining every corner, when I was suddenly stopped by the loud voice of Mrs. Daff on the stairs. In a moment I understood that Captain Belknap had returned unexpectedly, and that she was trying to prevent his going up.

"What the devil are you trying to keep me out of my own room for?" I heard him shout at the poor frightened creature.

"I'm doing nothing of the kind," she answered. "I say I was cleaning up there, and went in there with my pass key, which I left in the door. And that is all. And was thinking, only thinking, that you might think it just the least bit strange that I should go in your room when you was out; and if you'd just step away for ten minutes I'll have your room cleaned beautiful and all tidy, so as you'd hardly know it—will you?" All this in an extremely high key, evidently intended to reach my ear, and spoken by my ally below.

"No, I'll do nothing of the kind," he replied angrily, "and as for your pass key I'll take it. Curse it, I won't have anybody prying into my matters, and going into my room when I'm absent. Get out of my way, I tell you; I'm going up."

I heard her heavy footsteps descending kitchen-ward, and his mounting leisurely to the little cell in which I was regularly caged.

Here was a dilemma for a respectable and well-to-do lawyer! Here a disgraceful situation! Why had I come here to this low dirty place, to do the low dirty work of a police detective?

Why?

Because I was desperately, madly, insanely, outrageously in love with my client from Brooklyn. I would have done anything for her—anything to obtain her gratitude. I wanted to get this letter for her myself—*myself*—without a finger's turn of aid from any detective or lawyer or private individual in the world—or Brooklyn. In the meantime he was mounting—mounting—and now had reached the last step of the staircase. Quick as thought I sprang into the wardrobe and closed the doors, holding them together inside. This was my only move. He might not want to get open the wardrobe; if he did—why I must just make the best of it. Knock him down, perhaps, and clear away.

But I did not want anything of this kind. I wanted to keep quiet. As yet I had not discovered anything to give me the slightest trace of the letter, and had the old wretch once become aware that his private quarters were likely to be entered at any moment by his enemy, he would have removed the precious paper of course at once. As I crouched in the cupboard, my limbs stiffening with the posture, and my chest heaving with short gasps from the confined and impure state of the atmosphere, I felt then on what a wild-goose chase I had started. I looked like the culprit—a regular jack-in-the-box, he like the free man, smoking his short pipe, and walking deliberately up and down the narrow room. One great hope buoyed me up—might he not now go to the letter, thus showing me the hiding place? For I could distinctly see all his movements from a crack in the wood of the cupboard.

I was beginning to get tired of this game of hide-and-seek. The Captain had come

back to his room, evidently for the purpose of reposing himself merely; for he smoked one pipe after another, lolled on the bed, got up again, loafed up and down the floor, gazed stupidly out of the window, whistled a nautical air, and then finally began making a fresh toilette, prior, perhaps, to going out again. His ablutions were of the simplest character, consisting of a slight "dab" with a wet towel on his forehead and cheeks, and a half second's immersion of his finger tips in a basin with a limited supply of water. Then the Captain took off his shirt, and flinging it on the top of a very diminutive pile of soiled linen, proceeded to unlock his trunk in search of a clean garment. The trunk, of course—the trunk! The letter must be in there! I watched him eagerly as he laid out the trifles it contained, and then after selecting the second shirt, perhaps because it was in better condition than the first, he laid them back again one by one. He had emptied it, I could see, to the very bottom, and there was not the slightest vestige of writing or papers!

This was a disappointment. With mute rage I saw the old fellow complete his toilette, leaving off the ragged-bottomed trousers which he had worn when he entered, and putting on a somewhat better pair, which hung over the chair back, and whose pockets I had previously searched; he slipped on the same coat, gave a coquettish brush to his hair, and then devoted his attention and the efforts of a ragged silk handkerchief to the smoothing of his hat. I conjectured at once—and my surmise I ultimately proved to be true—that he was getting himself up in this seductive style for the purpose of waylaying Miss Wharton. I could have killed him where he stood. I am not sanguinary as a general thing, but I could have murdered that man in cold blood. For was he not persecuting, tormenting, fiendishly annoying my love, my beauty, my darling, my client from Brooklyn?

At length he went. I could hear him locking the door outside and removing the key—the pass key, which he doubtless pocketed according to his threat. Thump, bump went his feet and his cane, step by step, down the racking stair-case. Thump, bump,—fainter, fainter, fainter. I ran to the window and saw him in the street.

And for myself! Here was I, a highly respectable person, the counsel for the great Mr. Indette of the *Daily Comet*, besides being the attorney in numberless prominent suits for numberless prominent persons, locked up in a dirty garret by a half-tipsy old sailor!

I examined the lock of the door. I could not possibly force it. It was too strong for that. But I immediately remembered my ally below stairs, Mrs. Daff, whom I did not doubt would soon come to my rescue. I did not want her yet. No, not yet, by any

means. I wanted to be alone and undisturbed, so that I might hunt for the letter.

I began by ripping up the old carpet confined here and there by small-headed tacks, and thrusting my hand under as far as it would go. No letter. This work was tiresome in the extreme, for I was without tools of any kind except my small pocket-knife. With this I ripped open the mattress, and probed there. With no success. Pillows likewise were obliged to undergo the same vandal treatment. And all for nought—all for nought! Again I turned to the trunk. The lock of this gave way with one strong pull; the rotten wood ejecting the poor old lock, and looking as if greatly relieved by the operation. I need not have given my time to this, for I had seen before that there were no papers in it. But I wished again to assure myself, and I did—that there was nothing in it. About the chairs there was not the possibility of concealing even the smallest article; the seats were of cane—not stuffing.

The table which also served as wash-stand, contained in its little drawer (which came out half-way and then stuck there, refusing to go either back or forward) a rusty razor and a leather strap. Even the Raven would have been obliged to confess that there was "nothing more, only these—and nothing more."

By merely raising myself and lifting my arm I could pass my hand along the ceiling. In some places the plaster was broken, and it struck me that as the letter was a small object it would be easy enough to insert it in any one of these little woolly interstices, standing greatly in need of a coat of whitewash. "A coat of whitewash!" I repeated to myself in thought—"they need a coat and a pair of trousers of whitewash!" that was my joke, and a very good one I thought it. A coat and a pair of trousers—

A coat and a pair of trousers—and a pair of trousers—a pair of trousers!

By Jingo! Why didn't I think of them before? That was not the pair I searched before he came in! Certainly not. That was the pair he took off.

I seized them and turned both pockets inside out. Not a thing: not a vestige of any object! Still, not discouraged, I passed my hand over the seams, coolly ripping them open in such places as they appeared thicker than need be, carefully investigating the filthy mud-crusts of the bottom. Nothing—nothing. I flung them from me in disgust and despair.

As they lay with their two black bag-like portions (inaptly called "legs") sprawled apart on the bed before me, I saw that up to this moment I had overlooked something important. There was a third pocket which I had not examined. It was a watch or fob-pocket, and close to the waist-band peering quietly out, as one might say, was the tip of a folded paper.

My heart actually stopped beating; or so

it seemed to me, for I was fully satisfied that at last I had succeeded in finding the much-desired object. Stealing noiselessly toward it, as if it had both the sense of hearing and the power of getting away when alarmed, I advanced to the bed, pulled out the paper, opened it with trembling hands, and found it—blank!

I can never describe my rage and disappointment. I tore the paper in half, flung it on the floor, trod on it, crushed it beneath my heel, and paced madly up and down the floor. Oh! to be baffled in this manner! I, such a highly respectable person, and working in such a good cause! He, such a low-lived old rascal, worrying the heart out of my little darling—my pet—my beautiful Brooklyn client!

I stopped, and picked up the torn fragments before me, and examined them once more. This was not the letter—oh no—no such luck as that. But in one corner of the paper, written in a miserably cramped hand, was a memorandum, which I had overlooked. It was this:

9 (Counting all).

5 (Good).

9 Counting all, 5 good! What on earth was the meaning of that? 9! 5! To what did these figures refer?

I felt convinced they had some bearing on the letter. Some hint—some reminder of the spot in which it lay hidden. 9! 5! I kept repeating the words, and gazing about the room. I tried to count the tacks in the dragged-up carpet, the feathers, emptying out of the ripped pillow-cases, the straws from the mattress ticking—

I raised my eyes, and a new light burst upon me. Across the lower end of the room, there was nailed a rack for hanging clothing, originally composed of twelve large wooden pegs. On the eleventh peg there hung an old hat, but all the others were empty. Four of the pegs were gone, having doubtless been pulled down, by an overweight of hanging garments; and thus the fifth good one was the ninth peg, counting all!

With a sudden wrench, I dragged it away, and there, in the centre of the wooden peg, which had of course been hollowed out, on purpose to receive it, was hid the letter!

Yes, there it was! An old, thin, flimsy document, so weather-stained, and pocket-worn, that it barely held together. It read word for word, like the copy I had seen and was signed like the copy, "Carry!" The underscorings too were there, but it struck me that they looked done with fresher ink than the rest of the letter. I was not certain of this, and indeed it didn't much matter, as I had got the letter.

And now, to get out. A few kicks at the door brought Mrs. Daff with the key of another room, which opened this one very easily. Her horror at the sight of the rava-

ges I had committed was greatly lessened by the present of a five dollar bill.

Making my way at once to the Park, I saw, as I expected to see, my darling girl seated on the stone bench with her eyes red with weeping, and the old scoundrel by her side, laying down the law to her with vehement wavings of the knotty stick. He smiled affably as I approached, and bowed with mock suavity.

"Ah, in-deed!" he exclaimed. "Do I have the pleasure of seeing you once again? Believe me, sir, I am truly yours! My dear young lady—or rather, my dear—daughter," (and the girl's lip trembled as he spoke), "this is your friend—this is your very good friend, Mr.—ah—what was it now, Mr. Gammon and Spinach—Mr. Gammon and Spinach—Mr. Threat—Mr. Bluster—Mr. All-talk-and-no-ride—Mr. Bombastes-Furioso!"

"Yes," I replied, with as much coolness as I could command, for I felt an irresistible desire to knock him down every time I approached this hoary-headed old villain. "Yes, Miss Wharton's true and devoted friend, who has at last succeeded in obtaining—the letter!"

I spread it out before them both as I spoke, and 'pon my word of honor as a gentleman and an American attorney, I never saw a more magnificent *coup de Théâtre*! The girl actually flew to my side like a bird freed from its wily prison; and the man, rising to his feet, uttered a loud groan as he assured himself it was really the authentic document which I had obtained possession of, and then fell with his whole length on the stone bench, completely inert and powerless!

"Oh dear, dear, darling Mr. Bywood," said my girl, laughing and crying together—"you are the loveliest, dearest, sweetest, *darlingest* lawyer I ever knew. How can I ever repay you?"

I told her how she could some months afterwards—not then.

"You're a thief!" said Captain Belknap, rising and fixing his bleary eyes upon my face—"a thief and a—burglar, to break into my room and steal that letter. Wont you pay me for it?"

"Not a cent, you brute," I exclaimed, "not a cent. Pay, indeed! Well, that is a good joke, 'pon my word."

"Well, something for charity, then."

Miss Wharton's pocket book was out in a moment, but I put my hand on her and prevented her opening it.

"Oh, how cruel you are," he moaned, beerily "how cruel. But come now, I'll tell you what I'll do if you'll—if you'll give me five dollars. I'll tell you something you'd give fifty dollars to know."

I would not give five dollars for the fifty dollars worth of information.

"Well, three?"

"I would not give three."

"Two and a half?"

No answer.

"One?"

Before I could stop her, Carry had slipped a dollar bill in his hand.

I observed that Captain Belknap got safely out of kicking distance before he spoke.

"Well, then listen. This young lady was just three years old before I ever saw her mother!"

With a little chirp of joy Carry pressed close against me and looked gratefully up into my eyes as if she fully considered that the fact of her being the legitimate offspring of her lawfully wedded parents was due entirely to my single and unaided efforts. I received her tribute of thanks without disclaimer.

"And now, if you promise you won't disturb me, but just let me go my way and you yours, I'll tell you something else about it."

I would promise nothing. I felt guilty to the last degree in allowing this fellow to go scot free, probably to again prey upon some innocent party. But Carry wanted secrecy; what could I do?

I did not answer; but I knew that Miss Wharton was nodding her head, and winking, and encouraging him to go on, as who should say, "Tell what you like: I'll be responsible for him;" meaning me.

"That letter was not written by your mother at all."

"What!" we both exclaimed.

"No. Don't be angry. It was written by a cousin of hers, whose handwriting was very similar. She was unmarried, and we were engaged, but the whole thing fell through after I went away. She used to take little Miss there out for a walk sometimes, and one day when I met them I gave little Carry a doll. I did indeed, you ungrateful girl! What is the paltry one hundred dollars I've had from you, compared to that? Dolls were very expensive sixteen or seventeen years ago. Wont you open your heart now, and—"

I could stand it no longer. I made a sudden thrust at him; but he, doubtless divining my purpose with an alacrity of which I did not deem him capable, flew out of the Park, cleared the corner, and was soon out of sight.

We never saw him again. I think he must have left the country, for Mrs. Daff, to whom he owed a fortnight's lodging, instituted a searching inquiry for her missing lodger. It was thoroughly unsuccessful, however.

Things went famously for me after that—things in the way of business. I pulled the Comet, tail and all, through lots of difficulties, and made such good arrangements with the creditors that Mr. Indette generously gave me twice the fee I should have asked; and I don't mind asking a pretty big one, either. Then came the Willis big case, and so I very soon paid for the expensive house in

the up-town street. Of course my darling married me—bless her. She said she fell in love with me the first day she ever saw me, at the time when we had all that missing-fire sort of business in our first shaking of hands; but, dear me! I was in love with her at least twenty minutes before that!

I think I've told you all. Oh, by George! yes; there is just one thing. No, on second thoughts, I'd rather not mention that. It seems so stupid. Besides, Carry would be vexed if she knew I'd told it.

You wont mention it, eh? Honor bright now! Make me look such a guy, you see—an old fellow like me, as I am now at forty-five, with a red face and a bald spot on the top of my head, as big as the palm of your hand. Ha! ha! By George! yes—that's it; you've hit it.

She is—she is *jealous*!

Stupid, of her, isn't it? Such a pretty creature as she is, and such a fat old curmudgeon as I am! But she doesn't see my defects. Oh dear, no. She kisses me so sweetly every day before I go to the office, and calls me all those mythological fellows, Beau Brummel, you know, and D'Orsay and Apollo and Adonis and the rest. Ah, come now, don't laugh. That's really not kind of you; and—I say, one word before you go! As you value my friendship don't say anything of this to Carry, for I've made her two promises—one is not to reveal her weakness, and the other is to humor that weakness by never again serving a lady-client from Brooklyn.

VI.

SLIGHTLY SENSATIONAL.

"I'm glad of that," said John; "the sensational is the only care!"

"How learned you are becoming, John!" I exclaimed.

"Ain't I though? That's Shakspeare! Only more so. Ah, Nelly! you haven't discovered half my talents yet!"

"Begin Nelly," said Aunt Julia.

Major Jim.

My name is Peter Barclay, and I am senior partner in the house of Barclay & Co., dry goods dealers, No. 10 — street New Orleans. I am not of a nervous temperament, nor am I in any way timid or cowardly. I was forty-five years of age last June; but the events of which I am going to speak happened nearly twenty years ago.

At that time I was head book-keeper in the house of which I am now the principal, having bought of my former employers with money which was willed to me by an uncle

of mine, who died in Australia some eleven or twelve years ago. I was a poor lad when I first went to them; but I think my employers respected me, and that they had confidence in my honesty the story will show.

It happened at that time that our firm had business relations in New York with a party who owed them what is widely known in the commercial world as a "bad debt," and this bad debt amounted to several thousands of dollars. They had tried hard to collect it—tried in every way—and failed signally. They had tried lawyers and doctors, and threats and persuasions, and vows of vengeance and promises to "knock off" a good round sum, but to all their manœuvres the bad debtors in New York smiled sweetly at the mad creditors in New Orleans, and continued as much in debt as before.

This being the state of the case, it was at last proposed to send me on to the Metropolis, to see if the actual presence of an authorized deputy, coming fresh from the spot, would not have the desired effect. I had full power to receipt for the firm, and the only fear was that I should get nothing to receipt for from the recalcitrant New Yorkers. I took passage on one of the fine "packet-boats" plying between New Orleans and Cincinnati, and, after rather a tedious trip of five days on the river, found myself at the picturesque landing of the Queen City of the West. We had arrived too late for the midnight train for the East, and there was nothing for me to do but to wait until the next morning, at eight o'clock, when the express train went out. Many of my fellow-passengers slept that night on the boat; but I was tired of the narrow berth in which I had lain and tossed for five nights, and, late as it was, I got a strapping negro to shoulder my trunk and carry it into a public-house on the wharf.

This house was called the "River Queen Hotel," and was a favorite with those men who earned a livelihood on the river. It bore a reputable name, and the charges were moderate. Both of these facts made it a desirable place of resort. I had stopped there once or twice before, and the landlord (an ex-clerk on one of the steamboats) recognized me as I entered.

"How de do, sir! How de do! coming to spend a few days in Cincinnati?"

He rubbed his hands together cheerfully as he spoke, but, little as I knew the man, it struck me that beneath his apparent good spirits there lay some unspoken trouble which he was trying his best to conceal.

"No," I answered; "I am going East to-morrow by the first train; but I wanted a good night's rest in a bed before I started: so I came here."

"Suttainly, sir, suttainly," he returned, still with an assumption of jollity. "Here, Bill, carry this trunk up to No. 12."

The porter did so, and the landlord ac-

companied me to the room assigned me, and busied himself with some trifling details for my comfortable occupancy of it during the night. Everybody spoke of him as a good-hearted, well-meaning man, and, knowing this, I asked him blankly what was the matter with him to-night.

"Did you observe that there was something the matter with me when you came in?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Yes, I did," I said; "you started when I opened the door."

"Did I? Well, I guess I'd better tell you the whole of the story, or you might think there was something wrong in me."

"I might. That's true enough." What made you start when I opened the door?"

"Because," he answered, slowly, "the first glimpse I got of you I thought you was the Coroner!"

"The Coroner!"

"Yes, the Coroner. We've sent for him, though I don't believe he'll come before morning. There's been a dreadful accident to-night. One of my customers—a real good feller—has been drowned!"

His eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

"Drowned!" I exclaimed. "How did that happen?"

"I don't know a thing about it. He was down stairs, drinking at the bar, about eight o'clock this evening, and I mixed him a mint-julep myself just before he went out, saying he was going for a walk on the wharf. Seems to me it couldn't have been more than a couple of hours after that when two men brought in his dead body. He had been drowned."

"Do you think it was an accident, or foul play?" I asked.

"I think it must have been an accident. Perhaps the liquor he'd taken made him kind o' unsartin where he was going. I don't think he had any enemies. He was as good-hearted a chap as ever lived. Poor Major Jim!"

"What was his name?"

"Major Jim. That's all I know. That's what everybody called him."

"What was his business?" I asked.

"Well, I've always thought he was a sporting-man. Still, I'm not sure."

A "sporting-man" was a sort of complimentary synonym for a "gambler." I believe the term is obsolete now.

"I only know," he continued, feelingly, "that he was as free with his money as if he'd been a prince. Poor fellow! How handsome he looks, laying down there in the back parlor, with his new brown overcoat lined with gray silk, and his big cluster-diamond pin stuck in his shirt bosom!" And the landlord passed the back of his hand across his eyes.

"Did you try to restore him when you first found him?"

"Yes; we tried everything. We had

two doctors in, but it was too late. Poor fellow! I suppose the Coroner will be here the first thing in the morning."

"Don't forget to have me waked at half past six."

"No fear. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night."

He left me.

I confess I did not think much more about the drowned man after the door closed on the landlord. I am not at all a heartless person, but Major Jim was a stranger to me; I had never seen him; never should do so; I was tired and sleepy, and had only a few hours for repose before me; so, hastily doffing my clothing, I tumbled into bed, and was soon fast asleep.

How long I slept I cannot tell, but my slumber was an uneasy one. I dreamed that I had collected the bad debt in New York, and was returning home with the money, when I was set upon by thieves, overpowered, and robbed of every cent. I awoke suddenly, and, sitting up in bed, I looked around the room for the robbers.

It had been a dream, and there were no robbers whatever. It was not yet daylight, and the fire was still burning brightly enough to make all the objects about the room as visible as though it were morning. I was just composing myself to slumber again when the door, which I had locked and bolted inside, opened noiselessly, and gave ingress to a man,—a man in a brown overcoat lined with gray silk, and with a great cluster diamond pin stuck in his shirt!

He walked over to the fire and began to dry his clothes which were dripping wet!

I can't say I felt afraid. I knew at once, or thought I knew, who it was, by the landlord's description. It immediately struck me there had been some mistake about his death.

"Say, stranger!" I sang out, "what are you doing in my room?"

"Drying my clothes!" he answered, without turning around.

"Who are you?"

"Major Jim!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" I exclaimed. "The landlord will be delighted. Then you were not drowned after all!"

"Yes, I was!" he said, still without turning.

"Yes, but I mean not dead. Not drowned—dead!"

"I am dead!" he said.

"Oh, nonsense!"

"If you doubt it, look at me!"

He turned his face to me now, and to my dying day, I shall never forget the sight!

The eyes were open, and were distended, glassy and staring. The jaw had dropped, and was fixed in that position. Across the forehead there was a deep cut, from which thick, black blood was sluggishly issuing, and

the soft brown locks were covered with green slime from the river!

"Do you doubt it now?" he asked, almost in triumph.

"N—o," I answered, horror-stricken.

He approached the bed, and placed himself in an easy posture across its foot, while I sat bolt upright at its head, with every drop of blood in my heart frozen into ice.

"I suppose I'm not a very pleasant companion just now," he continued, "though when—when I was alive, what man on the river was as good company as Major Jim? If I was kind o' lucky at 'seven-up' or at 'euchre,' nobody ever seemed to feel hard agin me. Ah! well, that's all over now!"

And he heaved a sigh which so greatly awakened my pity that it almost dispelled my fear.

Still I did not speak.

"You may be surprised at my coming in on you in this way," resumed the ghastly "sporting-man"—Alas! the "sport" was sorry enough now!—"You may be surprised at my coming in, and waking you up when you was sleeping quietly, and not thinking of the poor chap—me, you know—who, at this minute is laid out down stairs in the back parlor, with two men watching him!"

"Are you a ghost," I murmured, faintly, "or a madman?"

"I don't feel myself justified in answering that question; so, with your permission, we'll lay it on the table as they do in Congress, you know. All I've got to say to you is this: I've come here to do you a favor, and if you want to know *how*, listen! If you don't, say the word, and I'll be free to go."

Although I would have given a kingdom if I had had it to get rid of this nocturnal visitor, I nevertheless mastered my fears, and begged him to remain.

"It appears, I'm obliged to tell the secret to the first man that sleeps in this room. If he refuses to avail himself of my knowledge, then I've got to tell the next man that sleeps here, and so on until some one takes advantage of it. It's about money, and for that reason I'd rather Korley should know it, for Korley is about as good as they make 'em now-a-days."

Korley was the landlord.

"If Korley had slept here to-night, I could have told him; but, poor fellow, he's down stairs watching my body, while you, an outsider—a person I don't care a red for—have the awful streak of luck of hearing the secret."

"I have not heard it yet," I said.

"No," he answered; "but here it is."

Do you see that hearthstone?"

"Yes," I answered. "It is cracked."

"It is not only cracked but broken. Broken clear through. With any strong article for a wedge, the biggest blade of a knife for instance, you could lift half of it up as easy as rollin' off a log. The right half of it—what do

you think you'll find under the right half of it? Come, now, guess! Guess what a lucky 'fell' like myself—a high old sport, who's been travelling up and down between here and Orleans for the last ten years—guess what he'd have to hide under a hearthstone! Guess!"

"Money?"

"Ha, ha!" he shouted; and his laugh was so loud that it seemed impossible that those below should not hear it, and come rushing up. "How funny it is that you should have guessed it right the very first pop! Yes, sir! it is money—money that I have earned by the sweat of my brow and the manipulation of pasteboard, during the last ten years. All in gold, too! all sorts—beautiful Spanish doubloons, and American eagles, and French loneyes, and English sovs! Splendid! I didn't want to put them in no bank. No indeed. There ain't one of them that won't break before the year's out. No, sir! none of your rotten shinplasters for me! All gold! Now don't you consider yourself a most all-fired lucky coon, sir."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because you are the first man who sleeps in this room—and therefore *all that money is yours!*"

I confess to a sort of warming up in the region of the heart and pocket at this announcement. What I, poor Pete Barclay, with fifteen dollars a week salary, the possessor of the large winnings of ten years, belonging to a successful "sport!" It took away my breath.

"Get up and look at it," said Major Jim.

I drew on some of my clothing, got out of bed, lighted a candle, and walked over to the fireplace. There was the stone just as he had said, cracked through. The fissure was wide enough for me to insert my finger. I probed about curiously. There was earth beneath. I wondered at that, as this was not a room on the ground floor; but then I remembered that the wharf ended in a steep hill, and that all the houses on what we of New Orleans call the levee, were backed by a bank. This explained the earthwork.

"You see," said Major Jim, taking the candle from my hand and spilling the spermin about, "I found myself in possession of a lot of gold, and I didn't want to bank it. I didn't think it would be safe in bank. This room was mine. Nobody else ever occupied it. Korley wouldn't have let it to you to-night if I hadn't been dead." (And he looked up at me with his stony eyes steadily, and with perfect composure). "So I bought an earthen crock, and I put my gold in it, and I buried it under this hearthstone. Every 'pull' I made on the river, I'd come up here, lift up the stone, and cuddle away my new beauties with the rest until it is now almost chock-full. Just think of it! Chock full of gold. And all yours! Ain't you a lucky coon?"

I felt that I was lucky. My horror of this dreadful dead Major Jim had vanished, and the innate cupidity which burns in every man's breast had become thoroughly aroused to the extinction of every other feeling.

"How shall I get the stone up?" I asked, breathlessly.

"Haven't you got a pocket-knife?" he responded, almost as excited as myself.

"I've got a pen-knife."

"Perhaps that will do; if the blades are strong, I'm sure it will."

I put my hand in my pocket and drew out the knife.

"Open several of the blades together, for strength," he said.

I opened all the blades which hinged the same way, and, inserting them under the stone as a wedge, gave it as powerful a "lift" as I could.

The blades snapped off like bits of thread leaving the handle in my hand. Quick as thought I tried the other side, only to repeat the experience. Disgusted, I flung the knife from me and began wildly clutching at the stone with my fingers, lacerating them painfully in the effort to lift the stone.

"I always used a great strong screw-driver, which answered the purpose splendidly. I can't think where I put it. You see when so severe an accident happens to a man as what's happened to me to-night—getting drowned you know, and thumped against the boulders at the wharf until I was stone dead—it's apt to make one forgetful!"

Heedless of his remarks, bent on obtaining the treasure, I shrieked to him to help me move the stone; and, as he stooped to do so, there came a thundering rapping at the door.

Major Jim laid his lank finger on his bloodless lip, and whispered hoarsely:

"Go see who's there!"

I walked to the door, and opened it sufficiently to see that it was the house porter, come to wake me according to my orders.

"It's past half past six, sir; in fact, nearly seven. I overslept myself this morning. Better hurry up, sir, if you want to catch this train. I'll come in and take your trunk."

"Wait, wait!" I shouted. "I'll let you in a moment. Don't attempt to come in."

And I pushed the door to, and bolted it again.

I rushed to the fire-place, to speak to Major Jim.

He was gone.

Not a trace of the drowned "sport" to be seen!

At that moment the sun, which had barely risen yet out of the murky fogs of the river, lit up the heavens suddenly, and showed me the reality of the commonplace and the absurdity of the supernatural! Had I been dreaming? There were the spots of sperm

spilled about on the cracked hearth-stone, the broken pen-knife, myself half-dressed, the vivid "truth-seemingness" in my memory of the features of a man whom I had never seen in life—what did it mean?

"You'll be left, sir, if you don't hurry up," said the porter, outside.

My senses now returned to me. I walked to the door, threw it open, and hurriedly began making my preparation for departure.

"Poor Major Jim!" said the porter, as he shouldered my trunk, "many's the dollar bill he's slipped into my hand for carrying his trunk out, and in this room."

So this was his room. How did I know it was his room before the porter spoke? Korley had said nothing about it.

I gave the man some money, and, taking my travelling-bag and umbrella in my hand, walked down stairs. In the bar-room, I met the landlord.

"Korley," said I, "did you sit up with the body of the drowned man last night?"

"Yes, I did," he answered, with a look of surprise. "How did you know that?"

Without answering his question, I asked another.

"Did the body—move—last night—at any time?"

"Move!" he echoed. "Why, you're crazy!"

"Let me see the body," I whispered.

This would be confirmation. Here was a man I had never seen. I might have dreamed about him, but it was scarcely likely a vision seen in a dream would be correct.

Korley opened the door of the back parlor and—there was the very man!

The brown overcoat lined with gray silk, the great cluster-diamond pin stuck in the bosom of the buffed shirt, the neat patent leather boots, the cut across the forehead, the dank weeds, green and slimy, clinging to the brown, soft hair; the eyes, closed now, but staring stonily nevertheless through their lowered lids straight into the depths of my awe-stricken heart! I could not look. I fled from the room.

What had I best do now? That the money was there—up-stairs, in the very place he had described, I could not doubt. Should I go back and get it secretly, or should I tell the affair to Korley, as Major Jim had said he wished the landlord to have the money?

"Korley," said I, while I was paying my bill, "that was Major Jim's room you put me to sleep in last night!"

"I know it was. It was the only room vacant in the house."

"Well," I said, slowly, "something very curious happened to me while there."

"How curious?" he asked.

"What would you say if I were to tell you I'd seen Major Jim's ghost?"

"O Lordie!" ejaculated the susceptible Korley, his teeth chattering already.

"I saw his ghost, I tell you, and from what he said to me, I think you'd better sleep in that room to-night."

"Me! In a room where a ghost comes—the ghost of poor Major Jim? No sir-ee! Not much, I won't. I wouldn't do it for—*for a pot of gold!*"

Without waiting to say good-by, I ran out of the house, and never stopped till I found myself seated in the cars going East.

To my great surprise and gratification, I collected the money in New York, much more easily and more expeditiously than I had expected. The bad debtors happened to be "flush" through payment of some of their own outstanding accounts, and they treated me with that politeness and liberality which characterizes the New York merchant. I got a draft from them for the amount due us, on a well-known banking-house in the Crescent City, and, my business being now terminated, I turned my steps homeward.

I should have stopped at Cincinnati, even if I was not obliged to do so, as I was. My mind was now fully made up on one point—if no one else had occupied the room in the ten days I had been away I was determined to profit by my former experience, and dislodge the broken hearthstone, in search of the treasure.

Korley was out when I arrived; but I asked immediately to be shown to room No. 12. Entering the room, my first thought was of the hearthstone. I walked over to it.

What a metamorphosis was here! In place of the broken stone, there now lay a new slab, without flaw or crack! Strongly cemented, too, on every side! While I was surveying it with amazement, Korley entered.

"What's the matter?" asked he, seeing my look of disgust.

"Look here, Korley," said I, "what did you have a new hearthstone put here for?"

"Why, the most curious affair happened two nights after you left, Mr. Barclay. Let me see, it's nearly two weeks ago now, isn't it?"

"Yes," said I, impatiently; "what was the affair—what happened?"

"Why, two nights after you left, I put a traveller to sleep in here, and the next morning he walked down stairs, paid his bill, got off, and when the chambermaid came in here to do the room, what do you think she found?"

"What, what?"

"That that broken hearthstone had been pulled up, and broken again by whoever did it, and underneath, imbedded in the earthwork, there was a great earthenware crock—"

"Filled with gold?"

"It might have been at first. It was empty when we discovered it. But near the door there, we found two pieces of mon-

ey—an American ten-dollar eagle and a Spanish doubloon."

I groaned aloud and dropped into a chair.

Why had I not stayed? Why had I been such an idiot? I could have killed myself. Should I tell Korley? No; he, too, had let the treasure slip through his fingers. It was more merciful to let him remain in ignorance.

"So, as the stone was too badly broken to be put back, I had a new one laid in."

I could not speak to him.

That afternoon, I went on board the *Autocrat*, bound for New Orleans. Korley was with me to the last.

"Did I tell you the Coroner came that morning, almost immediately after you left, and gave a verdict of 'accidental drowning.' Then we buried him. Poor fellow! We had to sell that diamond pin he wore, to pay his funeral expenses. He had no money, not a cent, and yet people used to say he cheated at cards—*dern 'em all!*"

"We're off!"

A simultaneous shout from myriads of voices—young and old folks, rich and poor folks, white and colored folks,—a creaking of machinery, a prolonged whistle from a steam-boiler's pipe, and the huge boat moves slowly away from the shore!

Korley springs off on to the wharf, waving his handkerchief in token of adieu, and the last I see of him he is standing in the doorway of the "River Queen Hotel."

I can give no elucidation of the events I have related. They happened just as I have told them. If it was a dream it was a very vivid one; and if it was a vision, wasn't I an idiot, a donkey, not to take advantage of it?

I have thought over it now pretty continuously for twenty years. If any of my readers feel like devoting the same length of time to it they have my full consent to do so. Twenty years is a long time, isn't it? I am forty-five years old now. In many respects I think I am a better man than I was then; but, howsoever that may be, in regard to this affair of Major Jim, I'll be hanged if I am in the least degree a wiser one!

VII.

SOMEWHAT RELATIONAL.

"In other words, My Cousin Frank," said I. "A relation in two senses of the word."

"How so?" asked John.

"Why if he is 'my cousin Frank,' he is a relation of mine; and as it is a story, *that* is a relation of mine also. Don't you see?"

"Is that where the laugh comes in?"

"It is."

John got up gravely, shook hands with me with tears in his eyes, and mournfully resumed his seat.

I repeated the title.

My Cousin Frank.

"Say what you please, old fellow, it's slow, deuced slow," said my cousin, throwing his newly-lighted cigar out of the window with such force that it continued its course on a straight line for many seconds through the sweet spring air, which greeted our nostrils, redolent with the weight of June roses and daffodils. I could not agree with him, although he brought all sorts of arguments to testify to the truth of his assertion. It was an incontrovertible fact that we had left New York while the capital yet bore its gayeties like Wolsey, his "blushing honors, thick upon it;" that we had come to a secluded place early in June; that we did not know a "soul" and were totally unacquainted with a "body" within fifty miles of our present place of residence; that there were no clubs, no theatres, no signs of an opera, no balls, no hops—literally nothing, Frank said, to enliven the dullness of Everton Point. We differed as widely on this head as we did on those of our physical and mental structure. I considered the place little short of an earthly paradise—if such an anomaly can exist—and had made arrangements to spend the summer on the picturesque banks which skirt the waves of the silvery Hudson stream.

Our present domicile was an almost princely residence, built but a few years ago by one of our then new rich, who shortly after became a prominent member of the numerous class of new poor. Secluded in a melancholy town in Germany, the family who once held state within these walls was eking out a miserable existence, whose sole support consisted of the rent of this house, the mad speculator, the father, who had raised them so suddenly from poverty to wealth, and more suddenly still lowered them from wealth to poverty again, having sunk beneath the weight of misfortune and of sickness—not of the body, but of the mind—and demanded no longer any domain on earth save a quiet and perhaps forgotten resting place in a cemetery where burial lots are cheap. Had he died before his splendid soap-bubble-fortune had burst, he would now be lying in Greenwood with perhaps an obelisk, or other flaunting lucre-bought thing, bearing upon its marble surface a list of virtues which only rich men possess, rearing its imperishable head far above the perishable clay which crumbles into dust beneath. It was not a pleasant story to have hanging about every nook and corner of our summer retreat, surely; but who, now-a-days, is so foolish as to busy himself about the antecedents of the place which for the nonce he inhabits? Matters it aught to you that on the deck you now tread on one of our ocean palaces was en-

acted a midnight crime?—that at this point a troublesome heir to property was pushed from his hold, and then (after a few minutes' lapse of time) a loud cry of "man overboard"—my eldest brother overboard"—was raised? Who knows of such things? Who cares to hear them? What good could we do if even we did know and hear? No; let it all pass. Let the Everton family die of starvation in the German village if such is their destiny, while I run riot in their princely halls if such is mine.

But I am not a man to run riot; everything in my nature rebels against that expression and against its enactment. Not that I am an invalid; but in my youth I was always delicate, and now in my manhood, little as I care to own it to myself, I am not strong. 'Tis true every person I know (except one) extols my face, my figure, swears I am a very Hercules for strength, a very Apollo for grace; but, thank Heaven, my looking-glass is no flatterer (caring little and knowing less whether the image it reflects is that of a rich or a poor man), and it tells me my cheek is sallow, my eye lustreless, and my form thin and emaciated. My physicians have often recommended a life residence in the more genial climes of Europe, or on our own far Southern coast; but I cannot go. Perhaps as the story progresses the secret of this will divulge itself.

I said above that my cousin Frank and myself presented the two extremes of man-nature. All that cringing sycophants said of me was true of him—tall, manly, athletic; "an eye like Mars, to threaten and command, Hyperion curls"—all the graces that poets and young girls dream of were the birthright of Frank Harley. We formed a striking contrast as we trod together the smooth gravel walks of Everton, or, mounted on English thoroughbreds, scoured the woods surrounding. He, straight as an Indian, elastic as a gazelle, soft-eyed and ruddy-complexioned as a girl. I, round-shouldered, careworn, melancholy, though two years the junior of the dashing fellow who was my almost constant companion. And yet such is the ingratitude of mortals, to hear his story you would think I was the lucky one, and he the poor, wretched *miserable* who felt that a great wrong had been done him in bringing him into the world, and numberless frightful acts of injustice committed since that interesting period. I can hear his complaint now; it always ran: "Devilish unlucky dog I am; not a penny of my own in the world, while you—thousands upon thousands." Fugh! money, money, nothing but money; the very sound of the word nauseated me.

Frank Harley's father and mine were two brothers, belonging to a family which boasted, even on this democratic soil, of being purely aristocratic; their ancestors belonged to that select few of English nobles who set-

tled here and possessed princely domains—whole duchies and principalities of grounds—but who fled back to England when our Revolution broke out. Some member, however, remained here, and this was our progenitor, who when he died left something more tangible than his name to his posterity. Thus Frank's father and mine were both rich men at the outset of life; but before long my father had made himself thrice richer than when he started, and Frank's father had wasted his patrimony till actual poverty stared him and his young wife in the face. Then a great expediency was thought of—the babe about to visit this mundane sphere, and who now complained so bitterly of his ever having been called upon to make that entrance, should be named, whether girl or boy, after the bachelor uncle, Francis Harley, who would, of course, in gratitude for said condescension, immediately constitute the as-yet-unborn member of the family his heir or heiress. But two months after the arrival of the little savior of the fortunes of his father's house the bachelor uncle became a bachelor no longer, and, in course of time, in answer to Heaven's call, and in direct antagonism to my uncle's fervent prayers, I came, and now, at the age of twenty-eight, stood bereft of all relations in the world except Frank, possessed of my father and mother's combined fortunes, of a weak constitution, and the paternal name of Francis Harley. My cousin was, I believe, christened this, too; but it would have seemed as ludicrous to call him Francis as it would to call me Frank. He was frank, gay, dashing, brilliant. I was Francis—cold, melancholy and ill-favored. I must not forget the other difference between us, which always formed the staple of Frank's conversation when we were quite alone and not likely to be overheard. I was rich. He was poor. We lived together, and had done so for years, he consenting to this arrangement because of no reason on earth but of my being "the deucedest nicest fellow going," and I falling in with it because it suited my fancy to have something that I could claim kindred with near me in solitude or pleasure. Sometimes I grew vastly tired of him, and often have been on the point of making a different arrangement; but as often have gazed into his face and seen the look of his father there, which brought mine back to memory, and then I said no word of my plan in regard to separation.

"Now, isn't it slow?" reiterated Frank, throwing himself at full length on a damask-satin divan, and kicking the sofa cushion out into space. I picked it up from the floor and brushed off the dust which his foot had left there. It was of no great value, a worsted thing, made by some woman's hand; but I placed it carefully on a chair. Then I answered him:

"Why, Frank, I see nothing 'slow' about it. We have horses, carriages, boating, fish-

ing; later we shall have gunning, long walks, all the new books to read, all the prominent New York journals and periodicals to devour, a luxurious house to live in, and magnificent grounds to surround us."

"Yes, but we don't see a single body from morning till night: we don't know a human soul within fifty miles."

To this argument of bodies and souls I could but remain silent, having no proof to the contrary to adduce.

"Why don't we go to some of the fashionable watering places?"

He knew well enough why we did not. I had left the city for health, and I did not think it very probable that scarce commodity was to be found in one of the watering places, where so much stronger liquid than water is drunk—especially under the guidance of my friend Frank.

"The house here is taken for six months," I said evasively.

"That's nothing," he answered. True, it was nothing to him. "We are forced to pay for it for that length of time," said he, using the first person plural, with delightful coolness; "but, by Jove! we are not forced to live in it."

True, again; but I still held out for my present place of sojourn. He harped at the different watering places with unceasing vigor, however, until at length I said, impatiently:—

"Go there alone, since Everton is so unpleasant to you."

A hot blush, part of anger and part humiliation, suffused his handsome features. How could he go to those expensive places without me? My conscience smote me for my baseness, and I at once said:

"Well, Frank, give the orders to the servants. We will start next Monday."

That was Friday, and a child who longs impatiently for a new toy could not have pined with more eagerness than Frank did for the arrival of the day of our departure. It came at last, however, as everything does in this world—joy, pain, health, sickness, death—and, like all these, fell short of the expectation. I felt that in leaving Everton I was leaving quiet, rest of mind, tranquility of heart: and that, in seeking the gay haunts of pleasure's votaries, I was rushing onward to misery, anguish and despair. Nay, smile not at the thought. A sick man who lives within himself sees the kaleidoscope of human life clad in far less brilliant hues than he for whom woman's heart yearns and her eyes overflow. What was woman's heart to me? What did I know of that incomprehensible piece of mechanism?

Frank had no such misgivings as myself. If he had been on the direct road to Canaan, he could not have looked more serenely happy than he did when comfortably ensconced in the railway car which was steaming on to Saratoga. He had provided himself with

numberless elegancies for the trip—little comforts of which I was utterly destitute—having a marvellously fine light gray silk coat, to protect his under one from dust, a jaunty hat, which became him much, and carrying in his hand a bag containing, I afterwards discovered, as many necessities of life in the shape of knives, forks, brandy flasks, &c., as if Saratoga had been a distant wilderness and we were going to found a colony there. Travellers spoke to us, and paid much deference to Frank, leaving me and my thoughts to keep each other company.

"Laura Asheton will be there," said Frank, carelessly gazing out of the window after a way traveller, with whom he had been carrying on an interesting discussion on the relative beauties of English and American girls.

"Where?" said I, all the blood in my heart rushing up to my face, and then deserting it, leaving me pale and icy cold.

"At Saratoga, to be sure," answered my cousin, "Everybody will be there; aren't you glad you came?"

Glad! I was intoxicated with joy; mad with delight. She was to be there—I should see her.

"How did you know this, Frank?" I asked.

"I got a letter from her aunt this morning, and she mentioned it."

Strange that Mrs. Warner should write to my cousin.

"Frank," said I again, just as he was composing himself to slumber, "are you sure that letter was for you?"

"Here it is—perhaps it was written to you. On the whole, I think it was, for there is an allusion to money in it. Nobody ever alludes to money to me, as I have none to allude to."

He handed me the letter, which was addressed to "F. Harley, Esq." It was but natural that Frank should open it, and yet his having done so angered me. It contained but a few words, saying that Laura had been recommended to drink the Saratoga water, and asking me privately (of course without Laura's knowledge) to advance her quarterly income.

My father had been Laura's guardian at one period, and had invested her money in some railway stocks, which paid a very handsome percentage; but for many years now the railway had ceased to exist, and all moneys which had been invested therein were among the things of the dead. But for all that I had kept on paying the amount she had been in the habit of receiving, often adding to it, under pretence that the road was doing better. She thanked me occasionally for the interest I took in her affairs, but of course suspected nothing further. I lay no claim to the title of generous for this—my feeling for her was of a different stamp. I would have beggared myself for her. And

now the secret which prevented my going South or to Europe is out—not such a very mysterious one after all. I was in love with Laura Asheton. I could not leave the country she was in.

It was night when we arrived at Saratoga, and found our way to one of those wretched caravanseries yecept a hotel. I toiled painfully up to the topmost story of the house, to reach the only room which was still vacant, leaving Frank to inscribe our names on that ponderous calendar of mortal (few immortal) cognomens, the register book.

The next day I made researches for Laura and her aunt, but found they had not arrived. My next duty was to send Mrs. Warner a draft for twice the sum she had requested. This done, I wended my way toward the hotel. There I found Frank conning the pages of a pigny newspaper with great and evident interest. At last a smile of self-satisfaction broke forth, and with a low laugh he exclaimed:

"There it is; look at it, Francis."

It was nothing more or less than the announcement of the arrival of F. Harley, Esq., under the head of "distinguished visitors."

"Did you ask them to put your name there, Frank?" I asked.

"My name!" he ejaculated. "What do they care for my name? I'm not rich, am I? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet;" but Frank Harley, were he suddenly dubbed Rothschild, would occupy a far different status in the financial and social world to the one in which cruel fortune has now placed the individual in question."

"What interest can it be to any one at Saratoga or out of it to know that I am here?" I said sullenly.

"The interest of the public is a newspaper's capital," he answered. "My being here is of interest to no one."

At this moment we were interrupted by the entrance of the clerk, who came rushing toward us, and, with great volubility and no little condescension, informed us that the "Ambassador *su-et* of rooms on the first floor" would be at our disposal the next day, as the ministerial party now occupying them were to leave by the early morning train.

"Very well," said my cousin, waving off the officious personage with a gesture worthy an emperor. "Have them ready as soon as possible, and then send up some porters to assist our valet to move our trunks."

The official retired somewhat abashed, but, on the whole, serenely happy. He was a pleasant man, looking as if he had been first well scrubbed with a scrubbing brush, and then suddenly immersed in large and snowy vestments of the material known as "duck." In this state of spotless purity in regard to clothes he remained during the whole period of our stay.

"Did you bespeak that suit of rooms, Frank?" I asked.

"Yes, to be sure. Who ever heard of F. Harley, Esq., being stewed alive in a box of a room on the fifth story? Now these apartments we shall have to-morrow are something like—they are grand, noble—they're dear, to be sure, very dear; but that does not matter. For see the advantages. We can entertain in these rooms—there are some professional singers here now—for a mere trifle we could give a splendid musical *soirée*."

"When you give that, Frank," I said, smiling, "please don't invite me."

"What a deuced low spirited, uncomfortable sort of a misanthrope you are, Francis," he exclaimed, petulantly.

Though it was scarcely fair in him to make this rebuke, I felt what he said was true. I was fast becoming hypochondriacal. Well, that was my fate; but was it not a huge piece of selfishness in me to trammel this joyous, frivolous spirit which restlessly fluttered its wings against the iron-bound cage in which destiny had placed it?

"Well, Frank," I said, "don't let me interfere with your plans for enjoyment. Be as gay as you can while you can. If I feel like it I will drop in at your festivals occasionally." So saying, I filled up a check for an adequate sum, and, after signing, handed it to him. He was all smiles, all thanks, all praise; pleasant words to hear; but as often before it had done, the sound of the voice seemed to me false and hollow. The bright eye was rendered brighter still; but it struck me that the increased brilliancy came from the greed which the money awakened, not from gratitude which the act called forth. After he had left me I cursed myself for a mean-spirited, narrow-minded, suspicious nature, and resolved to harbor no more such ideas about Frank.

Laura and her aunt arrived the next day, and alighted at the hotel where we were stopping. I met her in the vast space they call the "ladies' parlor," whither I had flitted, hoping to see her numberless times during the day. She came at length, however, accompanied by her aunt, in response to the card I had sent up to them. I watched her as she walked across the long room, and noticed that she was blushing, deeply enhancing her beauty thereby, and that she glanced nervously at every gentleman she passed, looking for him who had summoned her. Heavens! could so much emotion be caused by the knowledge that she was soon to meet me? My heart bounded with joy. She passed me; for I sat half hidden by a window curtain. As she did so I pronounced her name. She started and turned, and her look of blushing happiness was changed for one of disappointment.

"Why, Francis, is it you?" she said carelessly. "I thought it was Frank's card."

I said nothing.

"You ought to have some distinguishing

mark on your cards, so that one might know which it is that calls."

Was this the greeting she gave me after three months absence? Was this the encounter which I had longed for, yet shrunk from for very fear of her too great power over me?

"I don't know what we could have put on our cards," I answered, in a tone as careless as her own.

"Why not senior and junior?" she asked, laughingly. "Oh no, that would never do; people might think that Frank was your son."

"You forget that he is my senior, Laura."

"True. She had forgotten that."

"You ought to send up your cartes de

visite when you call," said Mrs. Warner.

A hot flush suffused my features at this suggestion. The difference in the individuals rendered even mistaking the photograph of one for the likeness of the other an utter impossibility. Perhaps I was morbidly sensitive on the subject of this great disparity in personal advantages between my cousin and myself; but it never troubled me except when I thought of Laura.

"By the by, where is Frank?" she inquired.

"Driving, I believe. I have not seen him this morning."

"Will he soon be back?"

"I suppose so."

At this juncture Mrs. Warner took occasion to thank me for the promptitude with which I had attended to "that little matter of business;" and thus, after the interchange of a few common-places, ended my first interview at Saratoga with Laura Asheton.

Perhaps I ought to explain how we became so intimate as to drop the titles of "Mr." and "Miss" and call each other by the Christian name. Frank and I had lived with Mrs. Warner for several years during our youth. Frank was an orphan, I motherless, and my father placed us under the charge of this good lady, than whom none better fitted to have care of the moral culture of two growing boys. Our intellectual requirements were more than satisfied by competent teachers, who gave us lessons at the house. My father was always prejudiced against boarding schools, and my health was certainly fostered with more care by Mrs. Warner than it would have been by any matron of an establishment of the "Dotheboys Hall" order. Frank was educated by my father in the same manner as myself. I have often wondered why my father never left him any money in his will; but to this day I can remember his telling Frank, and me too, for that matter, that the former was "an ungrateful, worthless fellow, whose only chance for becoming a solid, steady man was being thrown out into the world and left to struggle for himself." This he had never done since my accession to the fortune, and

it was one of my pet plans to marry Frank to the girl he loved, however poor or lowly she might be, and then on his wedding day hand him a check for as many thousand dollars as he had years, providing he married before he was fifty (which there was every probability of his doing). I could do this without seriously interfering with my own yearly income. It was in this manner that we three children, then called each other Frank, Francis and Laura, and to this day we have adopted no other mode.

I don't know whether Laura Asheton was considered a beauty by anybody but myself. She was a tender-eyed, pink-cheeked, amiable looking girl, elegant in her dress and figure, but laying no claims to the descriptive adjective "fast," being as directly opposite to "rapid" in every particular as well might be. I heard a ghastly pale lady say once to her that if she were dressed in costume Laura would look only like a peasant girl, and nothing more, with those red cheeks. Ah, lady! if Arcadia's peasants were like Laura, how fair would I leave the atmosphere of American *bon ton* to fly to those leafy bowers and dream away my life!

Frank returned from his drive in due course of time, and, on entering the room made a vigorous attack, in which the safety of the bell-pull was greatly compromised.

"Bring me up a bottle of Veuve Clicquot," said my cousin to the waiter who answered the summons; "the real thing; do you hear?—no trash! Be off, fly, begone. Clear out, will you?"

This to the Hibernian who was wasting precious moments in the inspection of the arrangements of our drawing-room, which had been enlivened a little by the introduction of some few *objets d'art*, bronzes, etc. Theatrical slaves, when they fly to do the bidding of the genii who command them, could not have disappeared faster than the Celt did on hearing Frank's peremptory order. He flew, and presently the champagne flew all over the cloth of the centre table, much to my annoyance; for I am a neat person naturally and cannot bear to see destruction of any kind. Wanton carelessness positively pains me.

"By Jove, sir," suddenly ejaculated my cousin, after paying his devoirs to the bottle, which I refused to salute, "she's the most gorgeous woman I ever saw. 'She's all my fancy painted her, she's lovely,' etc., etc. Have you seen her?"

"Yes," I answered, looking out into the hot, dusty street, at the jaded creatures who came here under pretence of seeking country air, and now pitying, now despising them for their sheeplike proclivities, in thus herding together in untoward places, because, forsooth, fashion willed it so.

"Where did you see her?" demanded Frank breathlessly, as if it had been a question of life and death.

"She came into the drawing-room to see me," I answered, quietly. "I sent up my card."

A prolonged stare, in which both eyes and mouth opened to their fullest extent, then an uncontrollable burst of laughter, were the signs of wonder and mirth with which my cousin greeted this remark.

"Well, well, I've always heard that still waters run deep; but to think of a quiet, retiring fellow like you having the 'cheek' to send up your card to a woman you don't know. And she came down! Of course she did! She'd heard you were one of the richest men in this country."

"Woman I don't know—'cheek,'" I repeated, in no very amiable tone of voice.

"Who are you talking about?"

"Who are you talking about?"

"About Laura Asheton."

"The devil take—that is, I meant to say, I wasn't speaking of Laura Asheton. I was talking of the new arrival who has set everybody on the *qui vive*—the renowned French lady, Madame de Viron."

I listened, but heeded not his wholesale praises of this lady; she had only been at Saratoga two hours; yet Frank at that moment could have written her biography if the pigmy newspaper had chosen to ask it of him.

"She's a young widow, just twenty-three; was married at some barbarously youthful period to an ancient brick, who considerably departed this life two years ago, leaving her an immense fortune all in her own right. Her mother is travelling with her, and they are visiting this country on a tour of pleasure, and will return to Paris in November."

It was not until this theme was well nigh exhausted (my patience had been long before) that Frank thought of the person who so constantly occupied my reflections.

"So Lolly has arrived, has she? Did you say anything about sitting next them at dinner?"

I frankly confessed that while with them I had never so much as thought of dinner; at which avowal of imbecility Frank gazed at me with an expression of pity for my weakness and sorrow for my incapacity, which was, positively speaking, "And this is the man"—I know he was inwardly saying—"who is rich, while I, such a man as I, am poor."

"I must see about it then," said he, more scornfully than the heinous circumstance seemed to me to warrant.

I accompanied him down stairs, heard him give the order, saw him fee the waiter, and then we strolled out together for a walk. It was a little before the dinner hour when we returned and repaired to the drawing-room to await the coming of the ladies. Laura and her aunt were among the first to appear. The beautiful blush which I had observed on her face in the morning again suffused her features as her blue eyes fell on Frank.

"Why, Lolly, how do you do?" said he, gazing over her shoulder at a bevy of ladies who were entering the room, and scarcely glancing at my beautiful peri, whose hand he was holding. "So you've come, have you? I told Francis everybody would be here. Why, bless me, how cold your hand is! You can't be well. System out of order, eh? The water will do you good."

So saying he dropped the little hand, and left her to encase it in a tiny glove, as she had done to its mate already. I knew the cause of the cold hand. I knew all the symptoms—contradictory, extraordinary, inexplicable—which the emotion of the heart will awaken in the body. I knew it, and then cursed myself. She loved Frank Harley—it was as plain as day—the boy who had teased her as a child, whom she knew as a man to be fickle and faithless. She now hardly dared to lift her eyelids to him, investing him with that sanctity which was the reflex of her own pure feeling, and not in any manner a part of the man's nature.

By some singular coincidence—perhaps not so mysterious to Frank as to the rest—the new arrival and her mother sat directly opposite us at dinner, and thus I had a good opportunity of scanning the features of the "renowned" French lady. My first impression was not altogether a favorable one; that is, my first impression of her face. *Au reste*, all was charming. Her dress was a pleasing mixture of grave colors and gay, and of a cut which, though youthful, still partook of a matronly character, suiting thus at once her years (yet few) and her position in life, which was advanced, as she had been wife, and was now widow, at an age when many of her sex are yet maids. Her figure was full of grace; but it struck me that the face, which all lauded for its piquancy, many for its prettiness—which Frank apostrophized in a rather singular, but perhaps not inappropriate, phrase, as "deuced lovely"—was more marked by an expression of combined boldness and cunning than I could have wished. Still, the more I looked at it the more attractive it became, and before the dinner was over I agreed with Frank that Madame de Viron was a very fascinating person in appearance.

"Fascinating! She's bewildering! bewitching! I say, Francis, did it ever strike you that our friend there on your right, Lolly Asheton, is a deucedly insipid girl?"

At another time I would have struck him to the earth for such an expression. My first impulse was to do this now; but then a second thought, quicker than lightning flash, came to me, whispering, "Let him think slightly of her. When she finds he does not love her perhaps she will transfer her affections to you." I do not say I clutched at this idea eagerly. I have ever been too proud to be mean, and what meanness could be greater than to underrate a woman you es-

teem under such circumstances as these? I did not reply to his question, the very subject of our remark causing a diversion by observing that everybody had gone, and as the dinner was over she saw no reason for not falling in with everybody's example. Everybody was gone except the French party opposite, who sat sipping their wine slowly and sensibly, after the European fashion. The two companions of the lady who had so captivated Frank were her mother, between whom and her daughter there existed not the slightest resemblance, who was called Madame de Monsel, and a short, chubby, slightly oleaginous gentleman, whose name I never caught exactly, but who, like the ladies, rejoiced in the aristocratic prefix of "de."

We left them in the dining-room, and, Laura and her aunt accepting a drive with me and Frank, we lost sight of Madame de Viron for that evening. On the next a hop was to be given at the hotel; and Frank informed me in the morning that "this night or never" he would be introduced to the fair French lady. I did not ask him how this was to be brought about, and was utterly amazed afterwards to see that he had somehow or other scraped up an acquaintance with the French gentleman, as my cousin left me to discourse with him. After they had taken "a drink" together and indulged in other friendly procedures, Frank came up to me and asked me in a low tone if I wanted to use the phaeton and horses that morning. I said no, and before the monosyllabic word had well passed my lips Frank was back again at the Frenchman's side, and begging that person to join him in his morning drive. This offer was graciously accepted, and the last I heard of the pair the Frenchman was loudly complimenting Frank on the beauty and good taste of his equipage, assuring him that it was far too stylish an affair for this country, and, to be properly appreciated, should be rolling along the smooth avenue of the Champ Elysees. They both passed me without a look or gesture, and I went to seek Laura. I found her, and, accompanied by her aunt, we took a stroll through the town. Her manner was, as usual, perfectly kind to me—a mixture of sweetness and friendly familiarity which oppressed me. How gladly would I have exchanged this for the blushing nervousness she displayed towards Frank! She inquired where he was, and seemed very uncomfortable when I told her who his companion was in the drive.

"Frank is rather remiss in his attentions to old friends," said Laura, with unfeigned annoyance.

"Ah, my dear," said her aunt, "I always told you Francis was the kinder of my two boys."

I pressed my good friend's hand for thanks, and looked up at Laura to see if she coincided in the sentiment. Alas! her thoughts were far away from me; for at that moment

Frank came dashing by in the phaeton, and the Frenchman directed his eye-glass to Laura's flushed face in so decided a manner that my very blood boiled at the sight of his now fast-retreating form.

"Insolent fellow!" I exclaimed.

"Who? Not our Frank, I hope?" By all the saints in the calendar, the girl had seen but him, nor even noticed that the Frenchman sat by his side! Once home, I shut myself in my room, and, engrossed in the reading of a book upon which I forced my mind to dwell, heard naught more of the actors in my drama till long past midnight, when an unusual hurry and bustle was heard on the staircase, and sounds of music began to issue from the dancing hall below. I then remembered the hop, and determined to go down—not to join in it, but to gaze at Laura in her ball dress. I knew she would be beautiful, and reason whispered me to shun her on that very account; still I could not resist the temptation, and, after a half hour of indecision, I found myself at the door of the dancing-ball. I settled myself in a seat behind the door, or partly so, and, glancing across the room, beheld Laura sitting with her aunt, and listening with downcast eyes and happy, happy smiles to the platitudes of Frank, who stood bending over her and whispering, fairly whispering, in her ear. They made a fine picture thus together, the handsome features of both enhanced by the excitement, and perhaps by the subject they were talking about, and for the first time in my life, for the first time in all the years I had known him, I felt that I hated Frank Harley. Hated him, not with a mean, pitiful spite which would wear itself out, but with the deep, undying hatred of a man who has been attacked and worsted in that which he holds most dear. Yes, there was the sting! I was worsted. If I had felt that he and I stood on equal grounds, as we did when we were boys, I could have fought the battle bravely, and if vanquished have succumbed; but to feel that he had conquered without even having so much as made an effort to obtain the prize which now lay quietly within his grasp! Why, why had he the advantage of me in every particular? And yet I—no, Laura Asheton was not a mercenary girl—perhaps if she had been it would have been better for my peace of mind; for I would have loved her less for that defect.

My mind was diverted from the scene which was passing before me by hearing my name pronounced repeatedly quite close to me—my name or Frank's, I knew not which.

"But how did you find out he was so rich, *mon cher*?" asked the younger French lady of their male companion; for it was he who had pronounced the name of Harley.

"Everybody says he's worth more than a million of dollars. Dollars! do you understand; not francs."

"Ah, *mon Dieu*!" exclaimed the lady, with

a little scream of delighted surprise; "introduce him at once, *cher ami*."

This little conversation was carried on in French, and I presume that, even if they saw me, they deemed me far too unlettered to understand their courtly language. My surprise at the disclosure of Frank's sudden accession to fortune was enhanced by seeing that gentleman himself approach, and, after introduction by the Frenchman, he began paying the most false, most shallow, most egregious compliments to Madame de Viron which it ever could have been that lady's lot to listen to. Disgusted at his insincerity, I left my retreat and went across to Laura. I observed that she refused all invitations to dance now, and I therefore deemed the moment a fit one for a *te-te-a-te-te*.

"You are not dancing, Laura?" I said, interrogatively.

"No," she answered, "I don't feel much like it; but what good genius brings you in such a scene as this, Francis?"

"The same who I hope will accompany me out of it. Will you go back on the piazza with me, Laura?"

She gathered up a large shawl or cloak which was hanging on the chair behind her, and casting it over her shoulders formed an admirable relief of dark blue to the delicate tinting of her face and hair. She took my arm with perfect freedom, and, when answering my questions, looked into my face with a guileless, indifferent expression, which was greatly in contrast to the trepidation and fluttering she had displayed when Frank spoke to her.

"Laura," I said, walking with her quite out of earshot of others who were engaged in the same pursuit, "this is rather an untoward place for a serious conversation; yet circumstances which have lately transpired force me, as it were, to have an immediate explanation with you."

"Dear me, Francis, what a portentous tone. What has happened to you?"

"There has happened to me the greatest misfortune which it has yet been my unhappy lot to sustain."

"Oh, Francis! my dear, dear Francis! how sorry I am for it! What is it? What can it be?"

She accompanied her endearing words by a look so full of sweetness and sincerity that, coupled with her angelic beauty, I forgot all I had previously seen, and in a moment of idiocy fancied that perhaps, after all, she did love me.

"Laura," I exclaimed wildly, "can you, do you, love me?"

"Love you, Francis? you know I do. If you were my own brother I could not love you better."

"But only as a brother, Laura? Only as a brother?"

"Of course, Francis, as nothing else."

"Not as a husband, Laura? Tell me—speak quickly!"

"No, oh! no, Francis, that could never be!"

"And why not—why?"

"Because I love somebody else, if you must know the truth."

"And that somebody is—"

"Frank Harley."

A groan burst from my lips. O, Heaven! must this man stand ever between my best hopes and their fulfilment? If he had robbed me of anything but her—her whom I had loved so long, so wildly.

"Laura," I said, with an effort to be calm, "listen to reason. Do not be insane in this. Frank is not worthy of your love. Oh! I am not pleading for myself now, but for you; your happiness. He does not love you."

"He does, sir. He swore it to me to-night, there in the ball-room."

My head fairly swam at this evidence of his hypocrisy. I, who had but now listened to his avowals to Madame de Viron, was half bewildered at seeing this pure girl so firmly convinced of his love for herself. And he, the man, what did he deserve? Naught but contempt—he was unworthy revenge.

"Oh, Laura, be warned!" I exclaimed; "how I could undeceive you in regard to that man if I chose."

"In doing so you would betray your cousin's confidence, for which you would meet with his anger and my lack of esteem. Good night, Francis."

She left me and joined her aunt, and I rushed up to my room, where I remained a close prisoner for a week. My servant, used to my vagaries, refused admittance to all, even to Frank, above all to Frank, and I had no opportunity of watching his progress, either with Laura or Madame de Viron; but I cherished in my heart such a hatred for him, for his fickleness, his frivolity, that I dreaded to meet him, fearing that, in the excess of my rage, I would do him an injury—him, the only living thing on earth in whose veins coursed kindred blood.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir; but there are two ladies standing outside who wish to speak to you," said my servant, in a low tone, fearing to disturb my reveries.

"Who are they, Williams?" I asked.

"Mrs. Warner and Miss Laura, sir."

My first impulse was to start and rush to them; my next, to falter like a man who had committed some crime which in a moment of weakness he has confessed, and now stands convicted of. I managed, however, to open the door, and there saw them dressed in travelling costume, evidently on the eve of departure.

"We couldn't go away without wishing you good-bye, Francis," said Mrs. Warner, holding out her hand to me.

"Are you leaving Saratoga?" I asked feebly.

"Yes, by the next train; and if we don't hurry we shan't catch it. Come, now, say good-bye to Laura."

All my old love returned with redoubled ardor at sight of her, and with it something of my old strength.

"May I speak with you for a moment?" I inquired—"only for a moment, but privately?"

"Oh, yes indeed, Francis," she answered. "I've been so unhappy thinking you were angry at me."

"Great Heaven! was the girl mad to keep saying such things, which, while meaning nothing, on her part, totally unmanned me? She withdrew with me to the embrasure of a window, and there I asked her bluntly, without a word of preparation or apology for my brusqueness, whether she still loved Frank."

"Yes," she replied, "more than ever."

I ground my teeth in an agony of disappointed love; and yet what else could I expect?

"And you think he loves you?"

"I am certain of it."

"Laura Asheton, answer me one question more. Are you under an engagement of marriage to my cousin?"

"Not a positive or definite one, but one that is understood. Frank is poor; so am I; before he can marry he must contrive to obtain a position of some sort."

Thank God, there was this impediment in their way. I revelled in the thought that I, with one stroke of my pen, could make the happiness of both these people—one of whom I loved, the other whom I hated. I would enrich Frank, I thought, and thus at least obtain her gratitude. No, no, I could not sell magnanimity even for such a price. I heard my cousin's voice on the stairs, and knew that he was coming to bid them make haste; so, not caring to meet him, I cast a parting look at Laura and entered my room, shutting them and him out. Would that I could have barred the door to my own wearying wearing thoughts as well!

In the evening, on returning to my apartment, to my anger and surprise I found my cousin installed there—awaiting me.

"Francis," he began, in a would-be sweet tone, "I have been cut to the heart by your treatment of me lately; I have, indeed. I have done nothing to merit it; I haven't, really. I never was so sorry for anything in my life as I am by your giving me the cold shoulder in this manner."

"What do you want of me?" I asked sullenly, rightly divining that that was the cause of all this wonderful affection.

"Francis, don't talk in that sharp tone; it's not a bit like your usual one. You know, Francis, ill or well, I have always remained with you, for no reason on earth except that you were the nicest fellow—"

"What do you want of me?" I reiterated still more savagely; for the hollow mask had dropped from his face now, and I saw the fawning, sycophantic features in their true hideousness.

"I hate to ask you, for you have always been so very liberal with me; but the fact is, I'm going to be married, and if you would just give me the—to you—insignificant sum of five thousand dollars, I would love you and teach my children to revere the benefactor of their father."

His children—Laura Asheton's children! and I the poor tool that must needs furnish the means for the marriage! It was too much to bear. The room swam round, my eyes seemed injected with blood. There was a struggle between us; for I fell madly upon him, and all I remember now is that, poltroon like, before he was touched, comparatively speaking, he cried "enough," and slunk away. I determined to leave the place the very next day, and bade my servant prepare for departure. As may be supposed, I saw nothing of Frank, and just before the hour of closing I presented myself at the principal bank of the town and handed in one of my checks for a trifling sum—just enough to pay the bill at the hotel and leave a surplus for travelling expenses.

"Money goes fast, sir, at Saratoga," said the cashier, opening his eyes wide when he saw my check.

"Yes," I answered, wondering what it was to him, but not wishing to be rude.

"Get that five thousand dollars all right this morning, sir?" inquired the cashier.

I gave a stare of surprise; but, remembering that in other instances than cases of mere bodily danger presence of mind is required, I said—

"Did you cash a check of mine for \$5,000 this morning?"

"Yes, sir. It was your signature; all right, you know. Your cousin drew the money."

"Let me see the check," I said.

He had no difficulty in finding it, and I saw at a glance that the signature was a forgery, executed by my cousin Frank. I cared not the rustling of the wind for the money; but the worst part of my nature had been dominant ever since our struggle of the night before, and a wicked joy took possession of me when I reflected that I held in my hand that which would separate him eternally from the woman to whom, I fancied, I had a better right by reason of my undying constancy to her. I would take this document, proclaim it aloud as a forgery; deprive Frank of the liberty he was now revelling in, and thus triumph. Who could tell whether in disgust for him Laura might not fly to me. I am sorry for these feelings now; but I cannot help them, as they are of the things of the past. Who amongst us has not had his wicked moments?

"I want you to give me this check," I said: "please balance my account and let me have it."

The man made no objection to this, and in a short time handed me my bank book, with the cancelled checks.

I walked away triumphantly, with the convicting document in my pocket, vowing inwardly that through it I would be revenged on Frank Harley. At the ladies' entrance of the hotel I met the mother of Madame de Viron. She was weeping bitterly, and it was some time before I could comprehend the cause of her grief. At last it came out. Frank Harley and Madame de Viron had eloped together! They had last been seen together in a carriage after Frank's return from the bank, and nothing further had transpired in regard to them, although many hours had since elapsed.

I was bewildered—perfectly thunderstruck! Had I known that it was the French woman he wanted to marry I would have given him double the money he asked for—aye, triple its amount.

"Americans are honorable, are they not?" asked the mother; "he will marry her?"

"I don't doubt it," I replied.

While we were yet speaking there arrived a telegram for Madame de Monsel. It was from her daughter, announcing that the marriage ceremony had just been performed, and begging forgiveness for their cavalier style of leave taking.

"Ah, thank Heaven!" sighed the lady, "how glad I am it has turned out so. I assure you she loves him truly. It was not his immense wealth that dazzled her—indeed it was not."

"I should think not," said a lady near, who knew all about our family, and had known us personally for some time; "she must have been dazzled by very little if that was the case. Why, do you mean to say that your daughter didn't know that Frank Harley hasn't a penny?"

"What!" screamed the old French lady; "do you mean to say that Francis Harley isn't a millionaire?"

"So he is, madame—this Francis Harley—but his scapegrace cousin hasn't a penny to bless himself with."

Another shriek from the French lady, salts produced, handkerchiefs in demand, and I left.

I had had scarcely time yet to realize all that had passed. There was much bitterness in the news to me; there was sorrow for Laura when she should hear it. But one good came of the evil in it all—the mad, blind fury, the beast-like rage had passed away, and there remained nothing in my heart against him but pity for his fault, pain for his position. I had vowed to have revenge through the forged check—I would take it now. I enclosed it and another for a like amount in a letter of congratulation to Frank

and wishes for his happiness. I knew little then of what I learnt afterwards.

"By the Lord, Harley!" said my friend Stevenson, whom I met in Broadway shortly after this occurrence, "this is a jolly disgraceful affair Frank's got himself into."

"What affair?" said I, fearing a repetition of the check business.

"What affair? Why, marrying that infamous Anette."

"Who's Anette?" I asked, wonderingly.

"Why, that French woman, Anita, alias La Precieuse, alias Madame de Viron, alias—"

"Stop! stop!" said I; "that will do." I wished not to hear the details of her life. I knew by this description that disgrace of the blackest kind was entailed upon the name.

Laura took the news very quietly. She said that her love had been rooted out surprisingly, and instantly on hearing of his marriage, leaving no lingering pang to cast a blight on her youthful pathway. I never spoke to her of the check.

I hardly dare tell the rest; for I have shown myself such a passionate, unthinking, unreasonable man that I fear to jeopardize Laura's good taste, when I say that by-and-by she bestowed on me the love I had coveted so long. She found out, through no indiscretion of mine, all about her real position in a financial sense, and gratitude caused her to entertain a warmer feeling than friendship for me. She tells me that perhaps this feeling is not that blind, uncertain affection she once entertained for Frank, but 'tis a flame which will still be burning brightly when the ashes of the other have lain smouldering for years.

I heard from Frank three months after his arrival in Paris (for they sailed for Europe immediately after their marriage.) Soon discovering what his wife was, he left her, not until she had avowed to him that it had been a settled plan between herself, the woman who personated her mother, and the man, to go to the United States and entrap some rich American into marrying her. The similarity of names between him and myself caused the mistake, and, finding that he was not the millionaire, she was as happy to be rid of him as he was glad to have no more to do with her. With the little that remained of the five thousand dollars I had sent him, he was on the point of sailing for Australia, where a lucrative situation had been offered him. He sent his love to Laura, and trusted that she still bore in mind the pleasant though "limited flirtation" which they had had at Saratoga.

We went there again this year—for all those events occurred in '65. We occupied, as I had before, the Ambassador's *salon* of rooms, and found again the identical clerk, clad as before in spotless duck, and looking ruddily happy from over the bosom of his elaborate

shirt. His worldly fortune, too, was evidently in a more flourishing state than before; for now he wore a diamond cluster ring, where of yore he wore one which we will say was gold, the device of which was a large shield whereon might be read the touching announcement that it was given by "P. B. T. to F. A. W." He jocosely insisted on our having the bridal chamber; but Laura shrank from the notice which that would entail. She had her wish in that, as she has in all things, and as she shall have as long as I have an arm to wield in her defence, gold to humor her fancies, and life breath to give power and animation to the heart whose every throb beats responsive to her own.

VIII.

CONTAINING GOOD NEWS FOR ALL, ESPECIALLY FOR THE READER, AS IT IS

THE END.

THE recital of this story had only brought me to the end of the fourth evening of the Christmas week. But I was not destined to continue my pleasant task. On the fifth day Aunt Julia was taken down with a high fever, and when we sent for Doctor Dos'em, he shook his head gravely, and said there was little to be done. It is but justice to him to say that he did little enough. John was dissatisfied with him, and sent for another doctor who lived in one of the finest streets in town and charged a dollar a minute for his time. He was more expensive, but not less unsatisfactory than Doctor Dos'em.

"You see," said he with a choice of language which sounded anything but choice—to me at least, "Nature, in this female, is about gone under. What can materiel mediker do against a gin'out nature? If you'd'r brought this woman to me about twenty five years ago, when she had a certain amount of vitality in her, you'd seen what I'd a' done then, mighty quick! As it is, however, that prescription will calm her nerves—keep down what we call hysterics—and—(five dollars first visit, yes sir)—if she gets worse, you might send for me, though I think I shall go out of town to-morrow."

We tried another and another. Really conscientious men these, whose practice lay among people who had nothing to say about any subject but the one of the illness which had visited a member of their flock, and whose attention was perforce centred on the patient. All to no avail.

The service-bells ushered in the Christmas morn, and from the little church across the way we heard the people singing loud an-

them of joy for the birth of the son of God. We sat by Auntie's bedside—John and I—holding her venous hands, our two children down stairs kindly cared for by a neighbor from the corner. Our little girl plead staunchly to stay near Aunt Julia. But our irresponsible baby Johnnie, only a few months old, screamed and kicked and was naughty generally; so both children had to go. At noon, the sun rose gloriously in the heavens, and the bells pealed out gladly again, and the happy-hearted stream of joyous humanity emerged from the church and had pleasant thoughts, in which perhaps the knowledge of a turkey at dinner was not the least consoling, especially as plum-pudding generally formed an adjunct, and fiery "snap-dragon" gleamed in advance before juvenile and scholastic eyes. A little equestrian statuette of Godfrey de Bouillon, which John gave me in the first year of our marriage, stood on our mantelpiece, and, though it was so familiar to me that for months I had scarcely turned my eyes toward it, on this day I fixed my gaze upon it steadfastly, and it impressed me strangely. They tell me (for I have it still) that it is a copy of a life-size one which adorns a public square in Brussels. It must be worth crossing the Atlantic to see. The air of fervent piety, valor and devotion stamped on these features most admirably indicate the character of the heroic conqueror of Jerusalem, who meekly refused to wear a crown of gold in the city where his Redeemer had borne a crown of thorns.

Feebler and feebler grows Aunt Julia's pulse. Fainter and fainter is heard the breathing of our patient.

"Oh! my aunt, can I do nothing for you?" moans my John, burying his head beside hers on the pillow.

"Nothing, my boy. It is almost over. Did you not hear what the doctors said? Nature is tired in me and must rest. More than that, it must finish. The works are broken, my children—the clock must stop."

John sobs loud and heart-rending. The silent tears course down my cheeks and bedew her thin, white hands, while the watch ticks with unconcerned precision on the table beside her bed, marking the time for Aunt Julia to die.

"God bless you all!" she whispers. "He will care for me. He whose birthday this is, I mean. Kiss the children for me; and tell Ambrose and Joseph I forgave them for turning their backs, and refusing to shelter the poor old woman; but," and a faint smile played on her lips, "I think they will be sorry."

The moon rose again in its cold beauty, throwing once more its mysterious steel-blue rays on the pure snow of the house and tree-tops, and on its blackened and defiled sister of the street. The children were in bed hours ago, and now fast asleep, and the kind neighbor from the corner had long

since gone home; and just as the ticking of the never-tiring watch pointed with its slender hands to midnight, and the clock in the church-steeple opposite proclaimed that hour to those who, sleepless, heard it, I raised myself noiselessly and peering into Aunty's face, saw that at that moment, too, the suffering of her physical frame was over, and the tired spirit at rest.

John had to be kissed continuously for the space of three years! I think I told you of this little peculiarity of his. Whenever any sorrow or grief fell upon him the entire available force of his household had to fall upon him as well, soothing his spirit with consoling kisses. Our little girl who had had five years' apprenticeship was quite an adept; but little Johnnie, who understood nothing about it, and evidently considered caresses bestowed upon his bald head a great infringement of personal dignity, behaved, I am sorry to say, in the most refractory and undutiful manner to his father, even going so far as to remove his tiny knitted sock from his rosy foot, casting it unfilially in Papa's face, seeming to say "There's my gauntlet, and down I fling it! Pick it up if you dare."

And now comes the most astounding part of all. It took me exactly six months to believe it; so I can't expect you'll take it in (as it were) all at once. What do you think came out after Aunty's death? That she had left a fortune—an immense fortune, which her husband had made in California, and which she had increased nearly threefold by judicious and happy speculations; and this fortune—this large fortune, multiplying into the hundred-thousands, she had willed unconditionally and unreservedly, the very day she received our letter, "to her dear nephew, John Morris—minus one hundred thousand dollars to be by him bestowed on Ellen Ann, his wife!"

Ah yes, to be sure, as you say! It doesn't astonish you so much as it would if you had known us under different circumstances. You have been so long accustomed to hearing John spoken of as the "rich Mr. Morris," and me as that "wealthy Mrs. Morris—not a bit proud," that you can form little idea of the joy, tempered with thankfulness to God, dears, without whose grace riches and worldly honors are as nought, which filled our quiet household at this unexpected news. Think of my dear, darling husband being relieved from the wearisome labor of the hammer and the mace! Think of the first luxury of the sweet *sur uiente*! (I got that out of a book, but I know what it means) to a man who had toiled with body and mind, day in and day out, almost from childhood!

But, dear me! all his riches couldn't take away his old love for ships. All the politics in the world did not interest him one third so much as a new invention in a

"craft's," machinery, or the hope of being able to better her "build;" and when our boy Johnnie grew up a little, and began to develop characteristics of his own, what channel do you think his tastes ran in? The channel of the sea, dears, the channel of the sea!

Then on his pretty little bed-room wall, all hung with white paper, and on his slate, and everywhere where it would receive the impression, he drew ships and ships, and then again ships and ships, and still more ships and ships, and after that ships out of all whooping. Ships, with hulls and bottoms, and spars, and sterns and stemsons, and much more beside. And finally, one day he marched in to the drawing-room where John and I were sitting, and said "Father I want a ship of my own. Buy me a yacht, will you?"

"Buy you one!" says John pulling the pretty lad of fourteen down on to his knees. "Kiss me, my boy. I'll build you one. Yes sir, build it. What do you think of that? We'll build it together—you and I. I'll teach you how. I'll show you what a fine workman I was, when I first married that good fat lady—your mother—there (kiss me Nell), and what sort of jobs I used to turn out before you were born, sir—born, or thought of."

"Oh, father, how good you are!" says the boy, twining his arms about his father's neck, much as I used to do in years gone by. (I do it yet when we're alone, but I'm such an unromantic figure now, girls, I don't much like to talk about it.)

"Good!" says John. "Nonsense, sir! kiss me, sir! I'm not good. I'm a brute to you. And I don't love you not a bit—oh no! and I'm not at all proud of you for being your father's own son and showing me that, like myself, you love a ship better than your dinner."

Well, if you'll believe me, these two creatures set to work like two common journeymen and worked and toiled and thumped, and came home at night looking like two tattered and torn ragamuffins, with appetites like cannibals and spirits as high as high could be, laughing and roaring, and talking about "afts" and "sterns" and "hatchways," and "midships," until, if I hadn't had the carriage the same as ever, and this house, you know, I should really have been tempted to believe that we had got suddenly poor again and that John and our boy were paid ship carpenters at so much a day—which "so much" was, alas! so little then!

I don't mind it myself, for I'm a sort of old-fashioned body; but our daughter, who is four years older than her brother and consequently just of the age for "society,"—she said she *really* felt ashamed about it, and she *did* wonder what the Highuns must *think* when they saw *Mr. Morris* and his *son* coming home like two laborers from *work*!

But when the yacht was finished, and we all took a sail in it, and pronounced her motion delightful (though I was as sea-sick as possible, but smiled grimly at John and let him believe I was enjoying it immensely) *then* everybody agreed, even our girl, that it was very pleasant to have a private yacht, especially one that one's private father had publicly built.

But, upon my word, all this time I've been so occupied telling you about other things that I've never said a word in regard to the stories. Well, John published them. Yes, published them, at his own expense. All the publishers refused them, with deep and heart-rending thanks for our having presented the MSS. to them. They said they were everything in the world except—something which they ought to be. But when John said he would pay all the expense himself—oh dear! that was a different matter. Then anybody would have published them, from Messrs. Big-Bag and Co., No. 2, Book-Publishers Square, down to In-Significant Brothers, in Tuppenny street.

John says they look beautiful in print—my stories do; but that's only his flattery I know. I can scarcely hope that you think so, too. Come now, one word—do you? You can't believe what pleasure it would give me if I thought you liked them. It's all very well for one's husband, or one's wife, or one's children, or one's parents, to think well of their relative as an author, but the true *Vox Dei* for us, as well as for those who trust to the elective, dears, is the mighty voice of the people alone.

And here another year has passed away, and Christmas come once more. Sweet, beautiful day, fraught with holy, tender and touching memories for every sinner saved through Him.

I have had lots of presents. In the first

place, John has given me a copy of my book printed on tinted paper, and perfumed, and bound in white morocco and gold, with a great cherry satin book-marker, to mark the place; and my girl some fine *mouchoirs* (as she persists in calling them), embroidered by herself. And Johnnie's present sends his father nearly wild with glee. It is a little ship, fully manned (of course not womaned; our sex is too unimportant for that), which Johnnie has awled and mauled and hammered and bannered and finally *made* with his own hands—a surprise for his father, but ostensibly, a Christmas gift for me. I pretend to be vastly pleased, and indeed I am. But how the pesky little thing is to be made to stand on the table, or the *étagère*, without "keeling" her over ignominiously on one side, is more than I know! Until my John tells me he will sock it in a dock, or dock it in a sock—I forget which; but some operation which will make it stand upright; for which I shall be truly grateful.

There is the moon again sliding out from behind the clouds and illuminating once more the newly-fallen snow! Our cheerful fire casts fantastic shadows on the ruby-colored walls, and John and I, and our two bairns, sit in subdued and silent happiness.

We scarcely speak one word. John, in a low voice, asks us all individually and collectively to "kiss him;" and we all lovingly,—so lovingly!—comply with his request. And thus, slowly but surely, midnight creeps upon us, and the day dies as the same day died when Aunt Julia died with it, long years ago. The anniversary is past, and Christmas over; but the glorious beams of Bethlehem's Star surely must be shining in our hearts; for deep down in them—even at the very core—dwell peace and love for each other, and for all men our brethren—on Christmas, and on all days—now and forever more.

THE END.