

music—"would not be the one I have just described to your humble sense as the strongest, noblest and bravest that it has ever been my lot to meet. Now, mad though you are for flattery, Robert, I have said those words for the last time. We must meet the future bravely. In a sense, this must be our farewell; it is 'hail and farewell,' for us, Robert lad."

"No—never, never!" said Rob, breathlessly, as though he actually plunged through the pearly gates of bliss; "there'll be a way! There must be a way! I'll make a way! I was not worthy—but I've won you! Say I've won you, since you care for me. Oh, God! I thought the way was hard, and all the time I was climbing up a hill that led to glory and the joy of life." He rose and strode once back and forth across the room, his humming-bird lightness of the head carrying him altogether into the realms of bliss.

"I'll make a way, my beautiful, my dearest—"

"Virginia is stirring," said the flute-voice, low. "You are behaving insanely. She will come in here presently."

"She will only think you have refused me," bending the ecstasy of his smile on Mary. "I am going out to tell her. Come with me, or I shall think I am dreaming. Come with me, dearest. You owe me this much. Remember the unkind 'exaggerated' speech you made about me."

"I remember," said Mary, sadly; "but we must remember other things as well. We are not free, neither you nor I."

"What binds you?" said Rob, in a flash, gritting his teeth in her very face, like a lion about to start out on the devouring path. Mary smiled.

"Not a lover," she made haste to say, "but I shall not leave Bate; no one else would make a home for him, or have two days' patience with him. No one. Even if you were free," she reminded him, very gently, for his joy was sweet to her.

Rob's "intuitive" eyes, scorning all barriers, took infinite largess of the future. He shrugged his broad shoulders as though the world of sordid entanglement, privation, and doubt, fell from them lightly.

"Besides," she said, "remember it was your faithfulness to what you believed to be your duty that won me to you, made me trust you. It would be a poor reward if your love for me made you give up the fight, Rob."

CHAPTER XXVII.

The "Wrestle" by the River.

The tremendous gorge of the River seemed to miss half the tides. It filled, of course, regularly; but to me, in memory, it seems ever to lie there, bare, eating its heart out in smiting sun and shrieking wind, ragged with boulders, its few harbored vessels lying in the ways, exposed like ghosts without an element.

Well, the tide had gone out of my soul, too, and left it stony and dry, only the ghosts of dead hopes stranded bleak along its channel.

Captain Belcher, shouting cheerfully along the highway with his oxen, seemed a denizen of another world. But I had business with him.

"Stu," said I, "you got to speak up. I'm boss. It's my turn. I'm running the thing now. Here's a paper ready made. Read it, and put our fist to it, or we'll see which is the best man, you or me. We'll settle it within this very identical ten minutes right here on the ground. Here's pen and ink. I brought 'em in my pocket a purpose."

"Witnesseth, Stuyvesant Belcher and James Turbine: I, Stuyvesant Belcher, do hereby say and acknowledge, that, the justice of the peace being at the time incapacitated, I myself did by way of a jest perform a ceremony purporting and pretending to be a marriage ceremony uniting Cuby Tee-bo and Robert Hilton. But, having no license or authority to perform any such ceremony, I do hereby declare and confess the same to be null and void, and in no way bind-

ing them the said Cuby Tee-bo and Robert Hilton.

And I, James Turbine, whose name is subscribed hereto, do say and acknowledge that no personification by law or otherwise shall be instituted or carried on against the said Stuyvesant Belcher.

Signed,

Signed, JAMES TURBINE.

"Jim, you're a scholar," said Belcher, reflectively, looking long and keenly at me; "you got it bad. Now, Jim, the 'arth is all 'fied and runnin' smooth. Why don't ye let her be till she begins ter creak? Then I'd see what I c'd do."

I laughed. "Sign here, Stu," I said.

"Whar'd ye steal this pen, Jim? Which end d' ye dip in the fluid? Mix a pint bottle o' ink next time, 'stead o' a quart, an' put in more bootblack, an' less dough an' hens'-ile, Jim; add a leetle molasses soon as ye git home, and a tetch o' new milk and cinnamon—somethin' soothin'." I better sign my own copy, too?"

"Certainly."

"Jim, see here; I can't git this signature ter look like the other. First time I signed my name there was a ham-rind stickin' to the point o' the pen, and now I'm workin' around here with a griddle-cake that fastened onto the nib the second time I dipped her into the bottle. The 'ain't no manner o' resemblance between them two signatures. I sh'll be held up for forgery."

"No, I'll look out for that."

"You'll perfect me, Jim?" said Belcher, with a great affectation of maiden simplicity.

"I'll stand by ye to the last ditch, Stu."

"Because, ef ye couldn't, I'm perfectly competent ter look out f'r myself. So you're runnin' things now, are ye, Jim? I thought the sun was risin' kind o' different this mornin', and the tides hove in as ef somethin' was werryin' 'em. Wal', don't be too brash, Jim. Handle 'em easy. How do ye like yer position? Does the highmighthiness of it pay ye for the pains?"

"No."

"Never mind. Somebody's got ter do it, an' I'm glad o' a rest, tell you work up a herrie'n an' I have ter step in an' put things ter rights again. Wal', can I move on now, or is thar' any more writin' ter do? Good-by, Jim. Remember what I told ye about puttin' some fresh-laid eggs, well beaten, and a tablespoonful o' vanilla extrac' inter that ink."

I put Rob's release safe in my inner pocket. When you are clearing the way for other people's bliss, and the woman in it has grown into your life till you don't hardly know life without her, you see blank for a while; that is, if you're not a better man than ever I was.

As I stood staring a bit toward the hill, meditating whether it was better to climb it at once and deliver over the paper to Rob, or sail direct over to Waldeck and telegraph Doctor Margate to come on and re-establish his charge financially, and take him and Mary away out of harm, not knowing what might befall them from the Gar' Tee-bo and Bate source, especially now if the altered conditions of Rob's life were known; so, as I stood, Cuby herself came running to me from her cabin door, all excitement, the brown hair on her forehead waving, hatless.

"Oh, Jeem, the bears is comin'! The bears is comin'! Look you!"

I looked, and saw—a recurrent yearly event in this region—three tawny bears of huge dimensions led by their keepers, approaching along the bluffs, creeping mightily and cumbrously along; resigned and hopeless travellers, soon to go through a forced dance and pass the obsequious hat before us.

"Sure enough," I said. "Lord pity them."

"Come along, Jim," cried Cuby, her bright face glowing, her eyes shining a rebuke at my indifference;

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